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Rising Sun

Book one. (COMPLETED)

It's not Sunkit's fault that his father is a filthy, betraying rogue. Just because he is almost an exact copy of him does not mean that he is anything like Goldensun.

Even though he was named after him, he isn't anything like him. Right?

Apparently not, according to every cat. Not even his mother can bear to look at him.

Sunkit goes through trial after trial to prove his loyalty. Will it ever be enough, or will he always be as untrusted as his father?

~

Allegiances

THUNDERCLAN

LEADER: Bumblestar - Pale ginger tom with amber eyes.

DEPUTY: Owlsong - mottled grey-brown she-cat with yellow eyes.
Apprentice: Ashpaw

MEDICINE CAT: Silverleaf - Pretty white she-cat with silver-grey patches along her back.
Apprentice: Whitepaw

WARRIORS

Stonefoot - Pale grey (with darker flecks) tom with amber eyes.

Rowanfur - Dark ginger tom with green eyes.

Gingerheart - Frail light ginger she-cat with one light brown paw and amber eyes.

Swanfeather - Long-furred white tom with blue eyes.
Apprentice: Sorrelpaw

Raventail - Sleek black tom with brown eyes. Former loner named Raven.

Tawnywing - Small light brown she-cat with green eyes.

Breezestorm - Dark grey tabby tom with amber eyes.

Oakfur - Dark brown tom with grey eyes.

Toadfur - Light brown scarred tom with murky green eyes.
Apprentice: Kestrelpaw

Pebblesplash - Pale grey she-cat with darker socks and green eyes.
Apprentice: Thistlepaw

Brindlecloud - Long-furred fawn-and-white she-cat with piercing green eyes.

Shrewfoot - Dark grey tom with green eyes.
Apprentice: Cherrypaw

APPRENTICES

Ashpaw - Light grey tabby tom with green-amber eyes.

Whitepaw - White she-cat with one grey paw and pale green eyes.

Sorrelpaw - Tortoiseshell and white she-cat with dark blue eyes.

Kestrelpaw - Small brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes.

Cherrypaw - Ginger and white she-cat.

Thistlepaw - Grey tom.

QUEENS

Hazelshade - Silver-and-white tabby she-cat with light brown eyes. (Mother to Heatherkit, a fawn she-kit with pale amber eyes, Ivykit, a white she-kit with light green eyes, and Sunkit, a pale golden tabby tom with amber eyes.)

Willowpetal - Pale grey she-cat with dark green eyes. (Expecting Swanfeather's kits.)

Foxtail - Ginger-and-white she-cat with a bushy tail and blue eyes. (Mother to Birchkit, a pale grey tom with a white chest and paws and dark blue eyes, Stormkit, a black tom with blue eyes, and Amberkit, a sleek black she-kit with a dark ginger chest.)

ELDERS

Sootface - Once-pretty dark grey she-cat with pale blue eyes.

Thrushwhisker - Wiry brown tom with dark green eyes.

Redfeather - Long-furred dark ginger she-cat with pale brown eyes.

WINDCLAN

LEADER: Driftstar - Grey and white tom.

DEPUTY: Cloudsong - Silver tabby she-cat with dark blue eyes.

MEDICINE CAT: Oatwhisker - Pale brown tom with a white chest and hazel eyes.
Apprentice: Beechpaw

WARRIORS

Thicketfur - Large pale brown tom with dark green eyes.
Apprentice: Primrosepaw

Poppynose - Light brown she-cat.

Blacktail - Black tom with a long tail.

Lioncloud - Pale ginger tom with green eyes.
Apprentice: Streampaw

Rockeye - Giant grey tom with brown eyes. Blind in left eye.

Voletooth - Light brown tom with green eyes.

Duskfoot - Pale brown she-cat with darker flecks.
Apprentice: Mousepaw

APPRENTICES

Beechpaw - Cream tom with one brown paw and green eyes.

Primrosepaw - Golden she-cat with amber eyes.

Streampaw - Silver tabby she-cat with pale green eyes.

Mousepaw - Small pale grey tom with pale green eyes and a short tail.

QUEENS

Whitesong - Beautiful white she-cat.

ELDERS

Wetwhisker- Pale grey tom with blind blue eyes.

RIVERCLAN

LEADER: Eveningstar - Pale grey she-cat with faint flecks, a dark face, paws and tail and dark blue eyes.

DEPUTY: Quailfeather - Dark brown tom with lighter splotches.
Apprentice: Wavepaw

MEDICINE CAT: Lostleg - Ginger tom with one leg missing.

WARRIORS

Ashwing - Dark grey she-cat with white flecks.
Apprentice: Webpaw

Fogbreeze - Pale grey and white tom.

Willowleaf - Light brown she-cat with dark green eyes.
Apprentice: Smokepaw

Ferndapple - Dappled grey she-cat with dark green eyes.

Barkfoot - Dark brown broad-faced tabby tom with amber eyes.

Iceleap - White she-cat with a long, bushy tail.

Shadeclaw - Dark grey she-cat with light amber eyes.

Foxface - Dark ginger and white tom with a large muzzle.

APPRENTICES

Wavepaw - Dark grey tabby tom with blue eyes.

Webpaw - Dark brown tabby tom with blue eyes.

Smokepaw - Dark grey she-cat with pale blue eyes.

QUEENS

Russetleaf - Dark ginger she-cat.

ELDERS

Snakenose - Dark grey tabby tom with russet patches and green eyes.

Dogpelt - Dark brown tom with a long scar across one eye.

SHADOWCLAN

LEADER: Flamestar - Dark ginger tom.

DEPUTY: Flashwhisker - White tom with amber eyes.

MEDICINE CAT: Goosewhisker - White tom with brown eyes.
Apprentice: Tansypaw

WARRIORS

Paleleg - Long-legged pale grey tom.

Raintail - Grey tabby tom with a white tail-tip.

Featherleg - Soft-furred, long-legged, dark grey she-cat with soft brown eyes.

Puddlepelt - Blue-grey tom with dark grey paws.

Lizardfur - Short-furred brown she-cat with green eyes. Former rogue.

Ratstone - Large black tom.

Lilytail - White she-cat with dark green eyes.

APPRENTICES

Tansypaw - Golden she-cat with bright green eyes.

QUEENS

Amberfoot - Ginger she-cat with white paws. (Expecting Raintail's

kits.)

Splashnose - pale grey she-cat with dark brown eyes. (Expecting Flashwhisker's kits.)

ELDERS

Heatherfur - Pale grey she-cat with pale blue eyes.

CATS OUTSIDE OF CLANS

Calisse - White she-cat with golden patches and bright blue eyes.

Azura - Tortoiseshell she-cat with bright blue eyes.

Lola - White she-cat with a grey patch over one eye. A kittypet.

Goldensun - Large pale golden tom with striking amber eyes. Former ThunderClan warrior.

Prologue

A soft breeze blew through the raven-black ThunderClan camp. It was moon-high, and a minor number of clouds dotted around the sky.

A particularly large one was covering a large part of the sky, relieving the clearing of having to face what little light the silvery moon emitted.

There were no creatures about - no stirring prey, no restless cats. The only sound that could be heard was the gentle 'tip, tap' of a dry leaf tumbling along the dusty clearing.

All was still. Yet something wasn't right.

A rustle in one of the dens disturbed a roosting tawny owl and it let out a terrifying screech, launching into the air, just as a head appeared at the entrance of the den.

Its gleaming amber eyes darted around, before a muscular, large body emerged, followed by a long, fluffy tail.

"Perfect," he murmured, his amber eyes gleaming hungrily.

He glanced around once more, before stalking forward, out of the shelter and warmth of the den, and into the cold, dark clearing.

He slowly made his way towards a large rockpile used as steps to reach another den. As he leapt up each one, he reminded himself how grateful the clan would be.

He was simply doing their dirty work, he thought to himself. They needed a better leader.

As he entered slowly into the den, a silver-grey body came into sight. The golden cat padded round to her head, and crouched beside her.

Everyone knew she was on her last life, though for some reason, they respected her even more. It was ridiculous. Well, it was time they realized that she wasn't a kittypet that needed to be worshipped, but a weak, mad old fool.

He lifted up a massive paw and unsheathed his claws- all long, thorn-sharp and as deadly as a fox's bite.

He sheathed them again quickly. "See you in StarClan," he purred, placing his paw on her throat.

He paused, before leaning down to whisper in her ear, "If you ever make it."

His claws suddenly unsheathed, digging into her throat.

He raked them down her neck, eyes wide, the hunger slowly dying as if a beast inside of him had been fed.

Suddenly, the she-cat's eyes flew open and she let out a mighty yowl, her paws flailing around and somehow managing to strike the large, golden tom in the face.

The clouds parted, revealing a large, silvery moon that shone into the den, lighting up the pale fur of the tom and revealing a scar across his nose and part of his face.

He winced, though placed his paw to her mouth, sheathing the blood-covered claws.

"Quiet down, kittypet. Nobody cares." He glared down into her dark blue eyes as the life died from them and her head finally rolled back.

The large tom prepared to dash out of the den, but when he turned around, a pale ginger tom stood, blocking the entrance.

His pale amber eyes were glaring into the large tom's. "I cared," he breathed, his claws unsheathing.

The large tom sighed, relieved. "Oh, Bumbleheart, it's just you." He dipped his head, relieved.

He padded over to the tom, but before he could say anything, Bumbleheart took a menacing step forward. "I cared about Cinderstar. And so should you, Goldensun. She was Hazelshade's mother, and her best friend- she even took Nightshade in as a kit when- never mind about that."

His eyes were wide, though wisdom shone from them. Goldensun thought quickly.

"Bumbleheart, brother, cover for me. You always said we'd rule together when we were kits. Let us fulfil that dream now!" He mewed, his voice confident, though Bumbleheart detected a hint of fear.

He glared at his brother, grabbed hold of Cinderstar's body and hauled her up into his back.

He stumbled out of the den with her on his back.

"Cats of ThunderClan!" He yowled, allowing Cinderstar's body to slip off his back and into the clearing.

As soon as a single head, a sleepy-eyed grey and white tabby she-cat, popped out of a den- the one next to the one Goldensun had emerged from- saw this, she let out a yowl, dashing over to her body.

"No! Not my mother!" She yowled, eyes clouding in pain.

Hearing the commotion, more cats begun to appear, gathering around the leader's stone-cold body, until a whole clan had gathered.

They were all murmuring so loud that Bumbleheart had to raise his voice so loud that a flock of ravens the in the trees of the thick forest surrounding them flew away.

"ThunderClan!" He yowled, fur bristling. They soon became silent and turned their horrified faces to the tom on the rock. "I stand before you and the body of Cinderstar. Who did this to her, you may ask?"

They began to murmur quietly to one another, until Bumbleheart flicked his tail for silence. The tom took a deep breath, before yowling, "Goldensun murdered Cinderstar!"

The chaos below was astronomical. Cats were on their paws, spitting at both Bumbleheart and Goldensun.

Cats were hiding behind one another. A few cats even ran back into the dens.

Everyone was clearly shocked, but none appeared to be as horrified as the silver and white tabby that had seen Cinderstar's body first.

"No!" She screamed. "Not my own mate! He'd never kill my mother!"

Bumbleheart beckoned with his tail for his brother to come out and face the clan, and, surprisingly, he did.
As soon as the she-cat saw him, she let out a troubled wail. "Surely it's not true!"

Goldensun leapt down, but instead of trying to comfort her, he just glared at the she-cat. "Oh, come on, Hazelshade. Nobody wants a kittypet for a leader!" He growled, his menacing amber gaze burning into her petrified green eyes. "Think of our kits!"

Hazelshade lashed her tail. "You're a fool, Goldensun," she spat. The hurt and betrayal shone raw in her eyes like fresh wounds. With that, she sped away into one of the dens, a ginger and white she-cat hot on her tail.

Bumbleheart, who had been watching quietly, suddenly let out a yowl.

"Goldensun, you know what this means!" He stared down at his brother. Goldensun shook his head, his dark amber eyes daunting. Bumbleheart sighed. "Goldensun, I sentence you to exile!"

Every cat below was glaring at Goldensun, and the crowd parted to reveal a path to the camp entrance.

Before he left, however, he glared up at Bumbleheart. His stare was of pure hatred. "You are a fool, Bumbleheart. I'll return, and I will

kill you!"

Once he'd yowled those words, he fled, darting out of the camp entrance, the last glimpse of him a flick of his tail.

Chapter 1

"Mother! Watch me!" A pale golden blur flew through the air at eagle speed, landing on the ground with an echoing thud. Sunkit quickly got to his paws, a burst of pride surging through him.

Maybe I've actually impressed her this time! He thought eagerly, a mischievous grin spreading across his face.

In stead of praising him, Hazelshade just turned away. "Hmm," She murmured absently.

A look of utter disappointment erased the grin.

Sunkit barely even noticed his two sisters, Heatherkit and Ivykit, dash into the den. "Help us! Help!" They squealed irregularly. Sunkit turned to them, noticing that they were giggling as well as shivering nervously.

"She's going to find us!" Mewed Ivykit in her high-pitched voice. Hazelshade turned to her two daughters and smiled.

"Who's going to get you, my darlings?" She asked, brown eyes questioning. Sunkit sniffed and turned away, his back to his family.

"Owlsong!" They mewed in unison.

Hazelshade gasped with mock surprise. "I'll hide you!"

She draped her sleek tail over them and pulled them closer to her. Sunkit stomped over to the edge of the den just as the deputy rushed in.

"Hazelshade! Where are those ratty excuses for kits of yours? They've been putting slugs in my nest!"

Hazelshade stood up. "Owlsong, my 'ratty excuses for kits' are the future of the clan. You often say we're better off without them." She glared at the deputy defiantly, her lips pulled back in a challenging

snarl.

Sunkit let out a huff. Every cat seemed to think that he and his siblings were nuisances. The only cats who ever really trusted him were Bumblestar, some of the kits, and the elders. Not even his mother had wanted him around for long. He'd never known his father, and all his mother had told him about him was that he had been a great, well-respected warrior, and he looked a lot like him.

Just because he was dead didn't mean he shouldn't be disrespected!

Owlsong lashed her tail. "Sometimes I think they really should have gone with their father. Grow up to be just like him. You know, a-"

Before she could say anything else, Hazelshade shoved her out of the den.

"If I hear a single word about that, I will find a way to personally exile you. I promise you that."

Owlsong seemed to have enough common sense to see it as a threat, and padded out of the den with a lash of her tail.

Though what Owlsong had nearly said intrigued Sunkit. What had she meant to say?

Before he could continue pondering the old she-cat's words, Hazelshade sat up, breaking his trail of thoughts. "Come here, my two beautiful she-kits." She beckoned to Ivykit and Heatherkit to come and sit in front of her.

Hazelshade craned her neck behind her, checking for other cats. Sunkit was about to follow his sisters when Ivykit swung her head round and glared at him, turning it back quickly when Hazelshade's head turned back around.

The she-cat crouched down in front of them. Her brown gaze softened as she watched Heatherkit yawn, and she waited for her to finish, before opening her own mouth to speak.

"Ignore everyone else. You are both beautiful kits and the clan is lucky to have you."

She leaned in to lick them both on the cheek, before drawing back.

"Momma, can we go and play with Foxtail's kits? Birchkit said that he, Amberkit and Stormkit were going with Raventail and Foxtail to see the lake!" Ivykit squealed with excitement. She and Heatherkit stared up at her with pleading eyes.

Sunkit curled up in the corner, not wanting to be noticed.

The last time he'd been with the three other kits, two of them- Birchkit and Stormkit- had teased him for being Goldensun's kit.

"Why?" He had mewed. "He was well-respected and a great cat before he died. Hazelshade said so." He argued. The two brothers had sniggered, padding away.

"If it's okay with them, then it's fine. And how about you, Sunkit?"

Hazelshade's voice caused the golden kit to spin his head. She had actually thought of him!

He bounded up to her. "Would it be okay if I stayed with you? You might get bored on your own." He stared up at her with pleading eyes. She looked into his eyes for a few moments, transfixed.

After a few heartbeats, her eyes grew fearful and bitter. "No!" She shouted, making Sunkit jump.

Her eyes suddenly lost the anger, and she turned her head. "Just... Go to the elders or something." She mewed, wrinkling her nose as if he were a piece of crowfood.

Sulking, Sunkit allowed his head to fall down, and he slunk out of the den.

Chapter 2

"-But when I looked up, the badger was gone! In it's place, a black tom! His name was-"

Sootface broke off as Sunkit padded into the den. "Hello, dear!" She mewed, a purr raising in her throat as he flopped down in front of two of the elders. Thrushwhisker, the other elder, blinked his pine-green eyes.

Sunkit stared around the den. Behind Sootface crouched Amberkit. She blinked happily when his gaze met hers, and she padded over.

"Shouldn't you be with Breezekit and Stormkit?" He mewed, sitting up. His fur prickled as usual when he was around anyone that he didn't know that well; he quickly flattened it, gaze trailing away.

Amberkit gave a small laugh, eyes sparkling with mischief. "I found my way back from the lake. I don't want to see the territory until I'm an apprentice- otherwise it wouldn't be a surprise!"

She jumped to her paws quickly, turning back to Sootface. "Can you finish the story?" She mewed. Sunkit noted how her fur was fluffed up in excitement.

She'd obviously heard something exciting, and he wanted to know what it was.

"If Sunkit's okay with it," the elder mewed, her pale blue gaze flickering between each kit. Sunkit's gaze snapped to the elder.

He blinked, before realising his fur had prickled up in anticipation and excitement for the story, making the tom himself look like Amberkit. "Oh. Um. Sure!" He sat himself down next to Amberkit a little too close, nudging her away as he sat.

Immediately he recoiled, hopping about a mouse-length away and sitting down. "Sorry!" He mewed, head turning around to her, ears

flattening. *Will she hate me? I hope she doesn't hate me. Is she alright?*

She shook her head. "Don't worry! It's fine!"

She shuffled back over to him so they were sitting next to each other.

"Now, Sunkit, I'd just told Amberkit how Redfeather had led a patrol of five cats- Gingerheart, Thrushwhisker, Owlsong, Aspenflight, a senior warrior back then, and I- to drive out two badgers that had recently moved into ThunderClan territory. We'd just attacked them, but all was not going well. Thrushwhisker was taking on the female herself, while me and the others were fighting the largest excuse for a badger I've ever seen."

The frail she-cat seemed to shudder at the thought.

"We managed to fight him until he had been shoved to the ground, and all turned to Gingerheart to help her except for Aspenflight, who had the badger pinned down.

"We managed to chase the badger off the territory and into ShadowClan's, forgetting about Aspenflight. Gingerheart had returned to camp by then, bleeding too much to continue fighting. It was just me, Thrushwhisker and Owlsong.

"When we got back to the clearing, Aspenflight was lying on the ground in a pool of blood. Thrushwhisker-"

she was broken off by the brown tom. "Aspenflight was my mate, and Gingerheart's sister. I rushed over to her. After a few heartbeats, it dawned on me that she was dead. Once I learned this, I rushed back to camp with her."

He dipped his head to Sootface, who replied with a soft, comforting purr. "She was a great warrior." She then turned back to the kits.

"In grief and rage, Owlsong threw herself onto the badger, but she was shaken off like leaf-bare snow. The badger lunged for me, and before you could say 'mouse' had pinned me down."

She closed her eyes for a while, and Sunkit guessed she was content

now that she had gotten back to where she was in the first place.

"I had shut my eyes, waiting for death, but instead, I felt swoosh of air, a roar, and then a triumphant yowl. When I looked up, the badger was gone, and instead stood a young black tom!"

She paused for a while, as if running over the memory again.

"I got up and padded over to the tom, who'd just killed the badger. He was large, and stank of badger blood. "Who are you?" I had asked. My claws were unsheathed. He had turned around. "I am Raven," he replied to me."

She finished with a dramatic bow, whiskers twitching. Sunkit turned to Amberkit, who had her eyes shut tight, clearly deep in concentration.

Suddenly, she leapt up, eyes flying open. "Raven is Raventail! My father!" She mewed, eyes lighting up.

The elder dipped her head, mewing with a voice cracked with age.

"You are clever, young kit. Intelligence always makes a great warrior." Sunkit purred as Amberkit straightened herself so she was almost as tall as him.

"Amberkit!" A shriek came from outside the den, causing the black and ginger she-kit to wince.

"That'll be Foxtail..." She swiftly leapt to her paws and hared out the den.

"What do you think you were doing, young she-cat?" The ferocious roar made Sunkit wince as well.

He stalked out the den, but before he had a chance to dash over to the nursery, a question caught his attention.

"Who's going to tell him about his father?" The voice belonged to Thrushwhisker.

He darted away before he could hear anything else, not wanting to

be caught eavesdropping.

Sunkit's sisters already lay by Hazelshade. The pale ginger tom nosed his way between Heatherkit and one of Hazelshade's paws and shut his eyes tight, though yowling outside from Foxtail kept him awake for longer.

It was ages before the ginger and white she-cat stalked in, a black and ginger kit dangling from her jaws, two kits following her.

When they lay in their nest, Sunkit finally fell asleep, his dreams filled with images of the story that Sootface had told.

Chapter 3

"Willowpetal! Look out!" Sunkit yelled as he flew through the air, hitting the queen in the head.

He leapt back, fur prickling, as the queen's head lifted, her pale green eyes chilling Sunkit to the bone. "Sorry!" He mewed as unsheathed claws came his way.

"Careful! You nearly landed on Aspenkit!" The newest queen turned her head back to where her two newborn kits, Aspenkit and Wolfkit, lay. "I can't wait until you're gone!"

Sunkit's fur prickled. He'd just escaped Hazelshade, who was going to give him- or perhaps she meant his sisters- 'the biggest grooming of his life.' He gulped, turning away from the nursery and padding, as usual, to the elder's den. Though before he could enter, a ginger tail stopped him.

"Bumblestar?" He mewed, turning to see the leader staring down affectionately at him.

"Sunkit, do you know why your mother told you to stay put so she could groom you?" Sunkit threw a wary glance in the direction of the nursery before replying quietly with a shake of his head.

"No..." It came out as a mumble, and he scuffed his paws, preparing to get told off.

In stead, Bumblestar just shook his head and let out a jolly purr. "Kits! Sunkit, just let her groom you. I'm sure she will tell you soon enough, or your father will come and collect-" He paused, a pained expression taking over his features.

Sunkit watched him, a cry raising in his throat. Hazelshade had finally told him how his father had died- killed in battle with badgers, and that Bumblestar had not been able to save him.

It was no surprise that the expression- one that appeared when he thought of his littermate- returned to his face.

"Sunkit! Don't think you've escaped me!" The kit winced, dipping his head to the leader, before following the call.

"There you are!" his mother's tone was accusing, causing him to wince once more. Suddenly, jaws grasped his scruff. "Badger!" He squealed, squirming in her grasp as he swung from side to side. "No! Don't take me to your kits! I don't want to be-" He broke off as he was roughly dropped in a nest.

"Noooooo!" He wailed as two smaller shapes padded closer. He shut his eyes tight, but all that came was rough licks on his head.

"O-oh?" His eyes cracked open to slits, and he could just make out the figures again. "Nice badgers?" He opened his amber eyes fully, and felt dumb as he realized that the "badgers" were his mother and his sisters.

He ducked his head, embarrassed, and allowed the grooming to continue, ignoring the sniggering from Ivykit.

"May all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the High-ledge for a clan meeting!" Sunkit bolted upright when he heard the yowl.

"What is going-" He was cut off by a tail-to-the-mouth from Heatherkit, whose eyes shone like stars. Hazelshade nudged her kits out of the den. "Go! The clan wants to see you."

Sunkit's eyes widened at all the cats, and his gaze trailed helplessly after all the pelts. His eyes briefly passed Thistlepaw and Cherrypaw, the clan's newest apprentices, who were beaming at him, but then over to a white warrior, then to a pale grey she-cat, then to a brown tom, a pair of blue eyes, a dark ginger she-cat...

He suddenly realised that all the eyes were trained on him.

"Wh-what?" He mewed, glancing over to his sisters for reassurance, but all he could see was their backs. He must've been so intent on the cats around him, he hadn't noticed the order to step forward!

He darted to where his sisters were, lashing his tail as Ivykit gave a snort.

"By naming new apprentices, we can prove that ThunderClan is strong once more." The clan leader purred. Sunkit gasped suddenly, realising after all the hints what was going on. They were becoming apprentices!

"Ivykit, you have reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be apprenticed. From this day forth, until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Ivypaw. Your mentor will be Breezestorm. I hope that he will pass down all he knows on to you." He nodded to the tom, who dipped his head and beckoned the white kit over. They touched noses and sat down.

"Oakfur, you are also ready to take on an apprentice. You had received excellent training from Goldensun himself, and though your mentor's choice of actions may have been... Rash, you have shown yourself to be a loyal, courageous cat to be proud of. You will be the mentor of Heatherpaw, and I expect you to pass on all you know to her."

He seemed in a hurry to get past the two she-kits. *Why would he want to focus on me? Or maybe he just doesn't want to focus on any of us. Do I bring him too much pain?*

He was now gazing intently on Sunkit, and, like before, so were the others. "Who would want to mentor him?" He heard a hiss from behind him, but ignored it.

"Sunkit, Sunkit... You are my brother's son- his only son- and I am going to take you on as my apprentice." Sunkit's mood changed from feeling slightly intimidated to judged at the costs of life, but he also felt somewhat ecstatic. *Did not see that coming.*

A few gasps ran through the clearing. One or two cats muttered quietly beneath their breaths.

Though amidst all this as if it was a leaf in the breeze, Bumblestar flicked his tail for silence. "Look, I know you all weren't expecting this. You're probably thinking right now that I'll be too soft on him,

because he is my kin. Well, I can promise you that I will most certainly not be too soft on him."

His gaze scanned the cats, focusing on a few before shifting to another.

"He will be given the same amount of training as Breezestorm did, when I mentored him. And none of you can deny that he turned out to be a brilliant warrior, can you?"

His gaze momentarily rested on his former apprentice and he sighed. "Sunkit, take another step forward." Sunkit was evidently scared, almost frozen to the spot, but curiosity took over and eventually he did.

"Flatten your fur, Sunpaw. Don't be afraid. There is nothing to worry about. Some flames cannot be destroyed by water, no matter how much there is." He purred, leaping off the rock.

"And those are the flames of the sun."

He touched noses with his new apprentice, who was still shaking, and then took a step back as cats begun to cheer for them. "Ivypaw! Heatherpaw! Sunpaw!" *My name is the quietest. I wonder why?*

The loudest mew he could hear was Amberkit's as she leapt into the air, trying to catch his eye.

He purred as new scents surrounded him, and closed his eyes as warm fur pushed around him.

Over all the noise, he was just able to hear himself murmur, "I did it. I'm one of them. One of ThunderClan!"

Chapter 4

"Sunpaw! Wake up!" The sharp mew shook him immediately from his slumber.

"Wh-what?" He shook his head, blinking his eyes to adjust to the light that was filling his new den.

He suddenly gasped, eyes widening, leaping up. "I'm an apprentice!" He padded out of the den, where Bumblestar sat waiting.

"Where are we going today? What are we doing? Patrolling? Hunting? Battle training? Patrolling? Wait. I just said that. Oh well!" He gasped. This day could be amazing!

Despite his questions, Bumblestar simply laughed and shook his head.

"Apprentices." He gestured for Sunpaw to follow him, and then got to his paws, heading towards the camp enterance, and the golden apprentice quickly followed.

"First, we're going to tour you around the territory."

Sunpaw glanced behind him just in time to see his two sisters approaching, followed by their mentors.

Oakfur was practically running to keep up with Heatherpaw, who had broke into a run, excited, while Ivypaw padded alot slower, chatting to Breezestorm about all she wanted to learn, and how amazing a warrior she was going to make.

Occasionally, the dark warrior would roll his eyes and yawn.

"Come on, you two!" Purred Bumblestar.

Sunpaw sat down next to his mentor as Ivypaw approached. "All the prey will have died of boredom!"

He led the way out of camp, closely followed by Sunpaw, whose eyes were wide with excitement.

~.~.~

"...And this is the training hollow." Bumblestar led the way into a shaded clearing, though before Sunpaw could even tell him how amazing it was and what it was for, he dived out the way when a surprised caterwaul echoed from somewhere in front of him.

Sunpaw leapt after him, but it was too late. He only just managed to pull his head away from his body when a flurry of ginger fur threw him to the ground.

Thorn-sharp claws pierced his flank for a few heart beats, but were quickly sheathed. The anxious, white-muzzled face of Cherrypaw stared at him for a few heartbeats, half confused, half horrified, but then burst into giggles.

"Sorry!" She purred, leaping off the tom.

He rolled his eyes and mumbled, "Just look out next time."

He padded over to Bumblestar, who was shaking his head, though an amused purr escaped his throat.

"Cherrypaw, though Sunpaw may look like an oversized hare, he certainly isn't."

Sunpaw let out a half hearted growl, making everyone laugh, except from Ivypaw, who simply glared at him through slitted eyes, then turned away from him, closing her eyes and letting out an annoyed 'Hmph!"

Thistlepaw emerged from the shadows, along with two cats he'd only seen at clan gatherings.

"Cherrypaw? What is going on here?" One of the cats, a dark grey tom, mewed to the excited apprentice.

Though his voice was strict and firm, his green eyes were alive with amusement.

Cherrypaw padded over to him, head hanging low. "I'm sorry, Shrewfoot. I wasn't looking where I was going. I'll do it better next time!"

She leapt in mid air, before bounding into the shadows. Shrewfoot rolled his eyes and followed her.

"Coming, Thistlepaw?" The other, a pale grey she-cat, mewed, before following the other two. The apprentice dipped his head to Bumblestar, before dashing into the shadows, calling "Yes, Pebblesplash!"

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"And that," finished Bumblestar as they entered camp, "Is ThunderClan territory."

He let out a yawn and flicked his tail to the apprentices. "You can fetch some food for the elders, and then get something for yourselves."

The large tom dipped his head before padding away to a group of senior warriors.

Sunpaw padded over to where scents- delecious, musky scents- drifted from, and chose two pieces of prey- a mouse for one of the elders and a sparrow for himself.

He grasped them in his jaws and dashed over to the elders' den. He placed his mouse at Sootface's paws quickly, earning him a rusty purr and a quick lick on the cheek, then padded away to eat his.

As he trotted by with his prey, he saw Cherrypaw sitting with Thistlepaw, Ashpaw and Whitepaw and thought about padding over, but Ivypaw and Heatherpaw scampered past him, and as she passed him, Ivypaw lashed her tail against his face.

"Mind if we sit with you?" She mewed to Ashpaw.

However, he noticed Sunpaw and nudged Whitepaw.

They both got up and lead him away from the other apprentices.

Sunpaw's fur pricked up, but Whitepaw smoothed it down with her paw, letting out an amused purr.

"Calm down, silly! We just want to sit with you!" She purred, Laying down and dropping her meal, a pigeon, at her paws.

Ashpaw sat down next to her, placing his kill, a large mouse, by his paws.
He too slid into a laying position and dipped his head to take a bite out of it.
Whitepaw let out a yawn, before mewing, "So, how was your first day as an apprentice?"

She curled her tail around Sunpaw, who had taken a bite of his sparrow.
Ashpaw looked up. "Hm... It's kinda hard to remember. We had a tour of the-"

"Not you!"

"Oh! Sorry."

"Sunpaw?"

~.~.~

Sunpaw lay in his nest, nose tucked under his tail.

Though it was only a few moments of sleep that he was able to receive before a paw jabbed him sharply.

He opened his eyes to the pale grey tabby apprentice, Ashpaw. His eyes were deep pools of concern, and fear rimmed every one of his features.

Sunpaw blinked slowly. "Wh-what's going on?" He mewed, voice sounding more groggy that he'd hoped.

The the apprentice's reply shocked him much more. "ShadowClan is attacking!"

Chapter 5

"W-what?" Sunpaw's voice was shakier than he'd hoped and he inwardly winced.

Ashpaw seemed to notice, and flicked him with his tail. "Now's not the time to practise how good your voice sounds." He mewed sharply, ears twitching.

"Come on!" Sunpaw shook himself from his thoughts and leapt to his paws.

He outwardly winced when he heard the sudden yowling of ShadowClan and poked his head out of the den, Ashpaw copying.

Suddenly, the older apprentice took off towards the enemy patrol and leapt at one of the smallest cats.

Sunpaw gaped as the grey tom threw it to the ground and raked his claws down the cat's belly. He shook himself back to his senses as he heard a yowl, and leapt out of the way as a pale grey blur flew his way.

Instantly, he remembered Cherrypaw. This apprentice has been taught the same thing... He thought as she scrambled to her paws. *She can't be that strong, but she's smaller and nimbler, making her faster*. He nodded to himself. *Yes*. He agreed silently with himself. *I'll have to corner her.*

Though the apprentice was clearly older and more experienced than Sunpaw, she was obviously not as strong.

He barged into her, easily sending her stumbling away on impact.

He unsheathed his claws and slashed them down her side, eyes wide as scarlet blood swelled in the wound.

Though he'd believed his blow to be rather powerful, it seemed to do almost nothing to the little strength the she-cat had.

She'd only been dazed for a second by the wound, and darted for him, claws unsheathed, scratching his leg. He winced, and she scratched his face.

"Are you even trying to fight?" The pale grey apprentice hissed, then lashed out again, but Sunpaw was quicker.

He stepped to the side, throwing her off balance. A smirk played upon his face, and he lashed out at her, hitting her square in the face, slicing her nose. She gasped, and Sunpaw felt his blood boil.

His fur fluffed up, making him look twice his size, and making the she-cat look like a kit. *Yes*. He thought, a cruel, satisfactory smile upon his face. *This is fighting. Cower, kit, while you still can!* He suddenly charged into the dazed apprentice, knocking her to the ground. He held her down with one paw, and was about to thrust his unsheathed claws down on her throat, when a paw stopped him. He instantly whirled around, and was shocked to find only the faces of ThunderClan staring at him, every single one in a state of shock.

Bumblestar had his paw on Sunpaw's unsheathed claws. "What kind of behaviour is that?" He mewed. "We don't fight to kill!" Sunpaw slowly took the other paw off of the she-cat and she scrambled away, whimpering, tail between paws.

"Sunpaw, I expect more from you! Or I suppose I should say I expected less from you..." The leader tilted his head for a while, but then shook himself quickly out of his thoughts. "That's not the point. Where did you learn those moves?"

It was Sunpaw who tilted his head this time. "Moves? I didn't have any moves. I made them up." All the stares on his pelt were those of disapproval, and a few had widened their eyes in disbelief. They made him cower.

Bumblestar seemed in a state of shock. "Hmm..." He murmured.

He flicked an ear to the cat next to him who happened to be Owlsong, and she nodded, then began gesturing everyone back to their den.

Bumblestar was glaring down at Sunpaw, both amber eyes locked together.

Soon enough, the apprentice glanced away, intimidated.

Bumblestar padded to Sunpaw's side and sat down, curling his tail around the nervous apprentice.

"In our skies," He began, before laying down so his ears were level with Sunpaw's. "There are many places that cats go when they die. Some are good, some are evil. Now, two of these places belong to the clans- StarClan and the Dark Forest. Obviously, we want to get to StarClan, the place where all the good warriors go when they die. But some cats are bad, and they can't go to Starclan. They go to the Dark forest.

"Now, in the Dark Forest, there are two kinds of cats- the cats who just stay solitary and hunt alone, ashamed of what they have become, and the cold, bitter, revenge-seeking cats.

"Sunpaw, some of those cats take living cats in their dreams and train them to become evil. Lots of cats you will have heard of- including Tigerstar, Brokenstar, Thistleclaw, Mapleshade, Snowtuft, Shredtail and many other cats in the elder's tales- went there and trained cats.

"All I'm saying is if you ever find yourself in that place, you must tell them straight away that you don't want to become like them." Bumblestar gave his nephew a lick on the head. "Alright?"

"Yes, Bumblestar." The young apprentice let out a yawn, and got up to go to his den. When he was halfway there, he turned around, suddenly remembering an unanswered question.

"What was my father like?" He scampered back over to the leader, eyes round and hopeful.

Bumblestar simply closed his eyes and shook his head.

When he opened them once more, Sunpaw was surprised to find that they were dark and deeply troubled.

"Another time, Sunpaw, when you are ready for it." He motioned with his tail for Sunpaw to go back to his nest.

Reluctantly, and with one last longing glance over his shoulder, he padded into the shadowed den, where soft, quiet snoring drifted out, and curled up in his nest.

Before closing his eyes, however, he raised his head to see Bumblestar's muzzle tilted up to the starlit sky, his eyes wide and sorrowful. "What have you done, Goldensun?"

He just caught the whisper, before laying his head down and allowing the soft pad of paws send him into a rough, unsettling sleep.

Chapter 6

Thud.

No, leave me alone...

Thud. Thud.

Just a few more minutes...

Thud. Thud. Thud.

Sunpaw groaned, opening his eyes. He was shocked to find himself lay in a large, clear puddle of cold water in the middle of a dawnlit pine forest. It was raining heavily, so the tom darted under a large pine tree and shook his fur, before laying down.

"No, Sunpaw. Don't rest. Resting is for the weak." Said a voice behind him. He turned his head to find a slim black she-cat gazing down at him, her green-yellow eyes thoughtful.

"A bit scrawny, but you'll do, I suppose. Screech was right when she said that you were not unlike me." Sunpaw got up and turned around, then sat down so he was facing the she-cat. "If you don't mind me asking, who are you?"

The dark she-cat let out a cold chuckle at that. "Why, Sunpaw, I thought you'd recognise Hazelshade's best friend *and* adopted sister when you saw her."

It came out as a purr, and Sunpaw gasped, a tiny flame lighting up inside of him.

Impossible... He thought, eyes lighting up. "Y-you're Nightshade? You and my mother did so many things together!"

If Sunpaw knew he was gaping, he gave no sign of it.

Then he suddenly remembered something else his mother had said.

"B-but- she said that you had turned evi-"

he broke off as a dark tail came to his mouth. "Shh, little one," she crooned. "Do you know why you are here?" She asked, almost too innocently.

Her eyes bore down into Sunpaw's own amber eyes, making him wince.

He glanced away, only to see it had stopped raining. Without another moment's hesitation, shook his head to the question. "Am I supposed to?"

She seemed to rejoice at that. "Oh, don't worry. That's just perfect. We can get a fresh start."

"On what?"

"Training."

Sunpaw gasped, eyes lighting up with horror. "Wait, are you from the Dark Forest? Wait. No, you can't be... That's impossible."

He quickly shook his head. "This is pretty. I like it here. Bumblestar said that the dark forest is, well, dark, and has evil cats like Hawkfrost and Mapleshade, the cats from the tales, in it."

He was staring out into the dark sky, watching the moon, so he missed the small bristling of Nightshade's fur, and the lash of her tail, and her disapproving glare.

"This may not be what you expected of the Dark Forest, but I am from it. Wait, just let me explain!" She mewed as Sunpaw's head snapped around to her.

He glared at her, but nodded rather curtly, his fiery amber gaze blazing hot with quiet fury.

"Some cats in the dark forest know what they did was wrong, and they are doing everything they can to get into StarClan. I am one of them. We only train cats to prove to StarClan that we can do things, that we deserve a chance to show what we can do."

At Nightshade's words, Sunpaw seemed to relax, nodding. "That makes sense." He mewed. "I think I can trust you." That won an approving nod. Then, he leapt to his paws. "What is this about training?" He demanded.

The dark she-cat let out a chuckle. "Eager, aren't we?" She purred.

"Training... Ahh, a wonderful word. Well, I can make you the cat you want to be. I can shape you into a warrior that can kill things like badgers in a few blows. I can make even twolegs cower at the sight of you, if you train with me. But you must promise not to tell anyone, for if you do, they might want to prevent you from becoming the warrior you will be once I've finished with you, Sunpaw. They will be jealous, and envy your future. Many cats may want to kill you for your place."

She blinked at him when he gasped. "Yes. It is true. Cats will go as far as killing, just to be trained by someone like me."

He gulped, then nodded. "I promise." He mewed, dipping his head to the she-cat. "But I still have two questions..."

"Ask away." Came the purred reply.

"Well, will Ivypaw have to train with me? I mean, she's not exactly someone I like, and if I have to train with her, I may not be able to train with you a-"

He was cut off by Nightshade.

"No, Sunpaw. You are the only cat I am training. Don't worry, there are other Dark Forest cats around to make sure nothing bad happens, and they have apprentices of their own, most inside the clans. But your training will not only be supervised by me, but the very leader of this part of the Dark Forest- the very edge of the Place of No Stars and the gateway to StarClan." Her eyes now shone with an emotion Sunpaw could barely detect; envy, fear, or perhaps pride?

She blinked, noticing Sunpaw's gaze averted to her. "But you're not here for that. You're here to train, so let's get on with-"

"And that brings me onto my last question. Who is the leader of this place? Who is my other supervisor?"

There was a sharp intake of breath, then an almost frustrated sigh, but when Sunpaw finally caught a glimpse of Nightshade's face, he saw a smirk of pride. "My mother." She purred. "Screech."

"Screech? Your mother is-" the young apprentice's eyes widened. "The cat who killed her own kits because they weren't evil?"

"All except one little litter of two." The dark cat seemed to grimace.

Sunpaw flicked his tail. "Well, I feel your pain. My mother ignores me, or fears me. One of the two." He glared down at the ground.

He was completely unexpecting the slash across the face, and the pain it drew. "Don't give me sympathy! Sympathy is for the weak!" She hissed, crouched down. Her ears were flat. Her fur bristled. Her eyes were deep pools of fire. Anger radiated from them.

Sunpaw gulped. "I'm sorry, Nightshade."

That earned him another unexpected blow.

"No, Sunpaw! Have you learned nothing? Don't apologise!"

"Yes, Nightshade. I won't." He promised, dipping his head. That seemed to settle her, for she sat up again.

"Aww. I knew you were alright." She crooned softly.

Sunpaw puffed out his chest proudly at that, and Nightshade nodded. "We'll make a warrior of you yet." She mewed, ears twitching with satisfaction. "But now you must wake up. You will be late for training." Sunpaw's eyes widened.

~.~.~

"Told you he would be an asset." Purred a voice behind Nightshade.

The dark she-cat just nodded. "And as usual, you were right, mother."

Chapter 7

"Again."

"Yes, Nightshade."

"Again."

"Yes, Nightshade."

"Again."

"Look! what is even the point of doing the same thing over and ov-"

"I said again!" Sunpaw winced as claws scored down his flank, drawing blood.

His training sessions with Nightshade were promising, though they often drew too much blood, unlike Bumblestar's training, which seemed like kittypet pampering compared to Nightshade's brutal ways.

Bumblestar was amazed that he was such a good fighter, as was everyone else, and nobody seemed to be jealous of him.

Sunpaw had once asked Nightshade to reveal his secret to Ivypaw, earning him a score of claws down the face.

"Why would you even suggest such a thing?" The dark she-cat had wailed at the time, her eyes widening. Sunpaw ducked his head.

"Sorry, Nightshade! I just thought that if she knew, she would stop being so mean."

"Yes, you proved that much." She had lashed out angrily, giving him a nick in the ear.

Sunpaw had been training for almost four moons in Nightshade's care.

At first, he came approximately once a week to the Dark Forest, maybe twice. A moon later, he started coming more, another moon, more, another moon, more. Now, he came almost every day.

"Sunpaw! Focus!"

The golden tom suddenly shook himself awake. "Sorry!"

" 'Sorry' isn't enough." Came the curt reply. Nightshade's eyes were glaring at him, and her claws glinted silver in the moonlight. "Now do it again."

~.~.~

Many attempts later, Sunpaw finally managed to master the move, and had Nightshade rolled on her back before she even knew it.

The move was where Sunpaw dove through her legs and shoved her up from underneath her. Not only would it stun and hurt the enemy, but there was a high chance that they would be knocked off their paws.

"Sunpaw, your training is remarkable. You have learned most of the important moves required. Now, there is something that you need to do. Follow me." She lead the way into the forest, ignoring any questions that Sunpaw asked.

~.~.~

They had been walking for what seemed like ages, when Nightshade finally told him to stop. "Listen..." She murmured. Sunpaw pricked his ears and closed his eyes, and instantly detected many voices.

"Come on! You'll never beat anyone in a fight with that sloppy attitude!" "Don't change my rules! How dare you!" and "Even kits can do better than that!" Were the three things that caught his attention most.

Nightshade seemed to detect that, and murmured, "That'll be Palestrike talking about beating others in fights, Juniperheart about rule-changing and Tornfoot about kits doing better... They always

say things like that. Anyway, follow me."

She emerged out of the darkness, revealing herself to a crowd full of cats.

Sunpaw followed quickly, eyes widening, though he quickly shook the feeling of awe off. *Don't show them you're afraid...* The voice in his mind whispered to him.

Fear is for the weak.

Sunpaw nodded to a pair of dark grey toms as he passed, following along behind Nightshade. Every cat stopped to look at him and Nightshade, and one or two snickered, a few bowed their heads, but most just stared.

Nightshade is one of the most respected warriors, along with her mother, Screech... Sunpaw suddenly remembered. *She will have told cats about her apprentice- me.*

He shuddered inwardly, though outward he stood tall and proud. He hadn't noticed it before, but he was nearly as tall as Nightshade herself, who was a rather impressive cat.

He moved quicker so he could tag alongside her. "Nightshade, why have you brought me here? I don't need to see other cats train."

That earned a warning lash of the tail from Nightshade, and also made her make a noise half-hiss, half purr. "Quite right, Sunpaw. You're here to talk to someone important."

She led the way to a gnarled oak tree. Sunpaw soon realized that it was the only tree that wasn't pine, and was huge, having many owl holes. Only they weren't for owls, he realised. They were for cats. And Nightshade was climbing to the very top, where the biggest hole was.

"Wait for me!" He yowled, and launched himself onto the first branch. He began hauling himself up the tree, reminding himself over and over not to look down.

It was a long time before he reached the top, but when he did, he

was shocked to find a completlely white she-cat in the nest. "Good evening, mother." Nightshade dipped her head.

The white she-cat rose to her paws. "Nightshade, my daughter."

Sunpaw gasped. "You're Screech? But you're so... White."

This made the she-cat turn around to glare at him, though instead of two eyes, she bore a single bright yellow eye.

"Foolish kit. What did you think? I was named Screech for my appearance? Did you expect me to be a dark brown, the same color as a hawk, or possibly the darkest grey, like Nightshade, and like a Peregrine Falcon?"

Sunpaw flinched and dipped his head.

"As a matter of fact, yes, Screech. Sorry."

He prepared for a lash across the face, bracing himself for the sharp sting of pain, but nothing came but a cold chuckle from the older she-cat. "You really are awful. Well, I was named after the first thing my mother heard when I was born. Anyway, you aren't here to hear about my past. You're here for- wait, why are you here, Nightshade?"

"Sunpaw's first assessment." She mewed quietly, though Sunpaw felt a shrill feeling of excitement fill his heart.

"Assessment?" He mewed, eyes wide. Screech snorted and rose to her paws.

"Foolish apprentice. You do not know what I mean by 'assessment'." She rolled her eyes.

Sunpaw glared at her when she wasn't looking. "Yes I do!" He mewed defensively, earning a warning growl from Nightshade.

Screech turned her bright gaze back to her daughter. "Fetch Crumb. This apprentice of yours needs a challenge."

Sunpaw gulped, seeing a look of shock on Nightshade's face. "Who's

Crumb?" He mewed quietly, eyes wide, though nobody was listening.

Nightshade looked like she was going to protest for a minute, but then decided not to, shutting her mouth quickly and dashing away to climb out of the tree.

Screech turned to Sunpaw. "You, apprentice, have been paired up with Nightshade's last student for this assessment, who died at your age and recieved the same amount of training as you have so far before death. Do not fail us. As for the assessment type? Well, let me say this... You-" -she paused, Sunpaw sensed, for effect- "-will fight to the death." The words hung in the air, much like the tension before a storm, and Sunpaw's heart stopped completely.

Chapter 8

"What are you gaping at me like you've just seen a flying mouse? I said you'll fight to the death!" Sunpaw shut his mouth quickly at Screech's comment, acknowledging his minor mistake by dipping his head in shame.

"He's not ready, Screech!" Nightshade mewed, eyes wide. "You didn't do this to Crumb- did you?"

The dark she-cat narrowed her eyes as her mother chuckled. "Oh, Nightshade, so juvenile. Her foolishness always brings me a smile."

Though it was a dark situation, Sunpaw couldn't help smirking ever so slightly at Screech's rhyme.

As usual, his mentor lashed her claws across his face. "You idiot, I'm not juvenile, or foolish. But you are foolish, Screech."

She turned to her. "But unfortunately, I must listen to you. *Mother*." She spat the word out as if it was an insult.

Sunpaw was now glaring guiltily at his paws. "Sorry, Nightshade." He muttered, shrugging. He glanced up and was incredibly relieved to find that she didn't appear angry, so returned to his usual posture.

"Snap out of whatever you're doing, fool!" Screech lashed her tail aggressively. "We have a battle to prepare you for." She grinned, showing sharp, glinting teeth.

Sunpaw suddenly dawned on what was happening. He, a measly apprentice, would be fighting a fully trained warrior of the Dark Forest.

Sunpaw had never seen Crumb, but the way that the two Dark Forest leaders spoke of him made his fur prickle uneasily. Every time his name was said, there was something in the tones that

suggested that he should bow at the very mention of his name. It made him want to be invisible.

But instead, he just puffed out his chest. "I'll fight proudly, with honor." He mewed, and boldly turned his head to Nightshade in case she was about to say something else, glaring at her for the first time.

He looked into her eyes and found no doubt there, only- for some reason- a deep trust and... *Wait, was that fear?* He couldn't tell since Nightshade blinked quickly, and turned her head away. However, the image of glassy, yellow-green eyes staring back at him was not one he could forget; he blinked and shook his head, but the black she-cat's face reminded him of something...

"Come on, we should prepare the competitors." She mewed, her tone still sharp from Screech's insults. She flicked her ears, before climbing back out of Screech's den and down the tree. Sunpaw glanced over to Screech, who nodded, and then did the same, the elderly Dark Forest cat following close behind him.

Now, Sunpaw rarely cowered at the sight of cats, but when he got his first glimpse of Crumb, he became a mouse against a warrior - hopeless.

A brown tom-cat with darker flecks, Crumb was clearly stronger than him. His muscles were bulky and obviously evident, his pelt had a glossy sheen to it as if he'd been training in the Dark Forest forever, his fiery orange eyes glowed with a hunger that could only be soothed by blood and his gleaming white teeth sparkled with a deadliness that warned Sunpaw that he would die before the fight had even started.

Chapter 9

"Well, well, well... This is the 'great and powerful' Sunpaw?" Mocked the large tom, turning his head towards the pale apprentice.

Sunpaw didn't know what to make of him- part of him told him to dip his head in shame like he would've done moons ago as a weak apprentice, but the other half nagged at him to do something, something to prove that he wasn't just an unexperienced kit.

Eventually, he gave in and let out a low snarl, baring his teeth. "Yeah, I'm Sunpaw," he challenged back, meeting the cats' menacing amber eyes with his own.

The tom snorted. "Calm down, kitty. Nobody's attacking you... Yet." He grinned, lashing his tail, which now Sunpaw could see was much shorter than his own, and had a stub at the end as if it had been sliced off.

Sunpaw's whiskers quivered uneasily, but he inwardly shook his head and told himself to focus.

He was about to spit back a rude comment, but the voice of Screech interrupted him before he had said the first word.

"Cats of the Dark Forest!" Everyone suddenly quietened down and turned around, so Sunpaw did the same. In front of him, he saw a large, jagged rock, and sure enough, the she-cat and her daughter were perched on the stone, Screech on the grey edge of the largest spike, Nightshade poised carefully on a crevice slightly higher up but further back. The rock itself was a stormy grey- almost black-colour, almost as dark as the murky-brown forest floor.

Sunpaw flattened his ears briefly as a rumble of thunder sounded, rather close, followed by the soft *pitter patter* of raindrops. He shook his pelt, before sitting down and watching Screech quietly.

"As you all know, we have a cat reaching his fourth moon with us: Sunpaw." She flicked her tail to the pale apprentice, causing heads to swivel and eyes to stare.

Sunpaw's mind wandered to stories of gatherings that he'd heard from the other apprentices. *Ashpaw said that everyone looks at you when your name is announced,* he recalled, suppressing his shudder. He heard a few soft murmurs from all around him:

"He's too small to fight Crumb!"

"He's kinda cute..."

"I'm betting on the bigger one."

He puffed out his chest proudly, trying to hide the prickling sensation that some of the eyes on him were looks of pure hatred.

As Screech continued to explain the positions of everyone and how the event would turn out, Sunpaw began to zone out, only to be shaken back to realisation by Crumb.

"Don't take it too personally when I murder you, alright?" Purred his opponent, sending an icy shiver up Sunpaw's spine as the tom flexed his large muscles, before sitting back down beside him.

Sunpaw glanced at the forever-night sky, suppressing a sigh. He pricked his ears as Screech mentioned his name again:

"-And Sunpaw will be placed on the left side. Now, we know that this is Sunpaw's first time, but there are still no rules about killing, and-" She was broken off abruptly by Nightshade, who hissed a few words quietly to her mother, who spat back a reply.

Nightshade glared at her, and Screech seemed to, in Sunpaw's opinion, agree to something. She let out an annoyed growl, before returning to her audience.

"Sorry, everyone... There is one rule, thanks to this sympathetic fool, and that rule is that Crumb isn't allowed to kill him. Alright? Good. Let's get into position." She bounded down the rock, closely followed by Nightshade.

Immediately, the two she-cats headed for the competitors.

"Listen, both of you. You will be watched the whole time by the stealthiest cats, so no funny business. Alright?" Both toms nodded, so Screech continued. "Anyway, I would like to talk to Sunpaw for a moment."

She glanced quickly at Nightshade, who nodded, leading Crumb to the far right of the clearing. Screech wrapped her white tail around Sunpaw's, dragging him forward to where he needed to go.

Once standing at the edge of the clearing exactly opposite Crumb, Screech sat down, indicating for Sunpaw to do so. When he did, the white she-cat nodded to herself for some unknown reason, before speaking:

"Sunpaw, I don't usually do this, but I am taking favour in you." Sunpaw widened his eyes.

The leader of the dark forest herself is favouring me? That's definitely a first.

"I would like to give you a hint, because I think that you have some potential to win. Listen closely, because I will only tell you this once: Crumb's tail does not work. Use that."

Sunpaw was staring at her like she was mad. Screech put her tail to his mouth so he wouldn't talk- not that he could, anyway- and got to her paws. "You'll see for yourself soon enough."

She grinned her sharp-toothed grin and flicked her tail, before throwing her head back like a dog and howling. "Let the battle begin!"

Chapter 10

For the first time in his life, Sunpaw was grateful for the sudden rainstorm, because otherwise the cats would've seen his fur bristling all along his spine.
The thought of death was awful, the thought of going to the Dark Forest after death even worse.

But what was the worst was the fact that if he won he would live with the burden of murder.

Don't be silly, Sunpaw. He retorted to himself. *Screech already told you, you aren't allowed to kill each other!*

Despite this, he still got the nagging sensation that his life was in great danger.

Screech had told both toms to go to separate parts of the forest, to test everything they'd learned; tracking, stalking, fighting, and killing- or not killing this time.

She'd told everyone else to take sides over who they thought the winner would be, and- of course- most cats chose Crumb.

Now, as Sunpaw shook his fur to try and rid it of rain, he lowered his head in thought.

"I hate it here..." He murmured.
Then, he raised his head to show he was ready.

"But there's no point saying that now... Now, I'll just have to try my best," he muttered, and awaited the yowl that would come to signal the toms to go.

The adrenaline pulsed through his ears, and for a few cold seconds, time itself seemed to freeze.

Sunpaw's eyes closed. He breathed in. He breathed out. He breathed in. He bre- *Wait! That was the yowl!*

He pricked his ears, amber eyes clouding with fear as he heard the shriek.

He quickly shook the feeling away. "I am being trained by Nightshade. I have no need to be afraid." He told himself quietly.

With that, he ran.

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Time seemed to stop as he galloped through the forest.

Jeers, calls, shouts, yowls and snarls were ignored. In fact, everything seemed to disappear.

It was just him and the twisted forest for a few moments.

He allowed himself to slip into thoughts for a few seconds, reminding himself of the past few days.

Then, he heard pawsteps. Light, disguised, careful, but pawsteps nonetheless.

Sunpaw took a step back, but then froze.

"He can hear me." He muttered under his breath, eyes dark.

He turned around, hearing a sound.

Just a breeze.

He turned back around to a huge paw with deathly sharp claws raking down his face.

Pain instantly seared through him.
Sunpaw darted away, but found the tom on top of him in just a heartbeat.
He felt a sharp bite in the neck, but it was not aimed properly.

Sunpaw rammed his head into Crumb's, ignoring the throbbing headache it gave him. The large tom seemed to be stunned. For a while, at least. Sunpaw took it as his opportunity, and though tired

and hurt, he ran like he'd never run before.

He stopped in a clearing, panting heavily. However, it wasn't long before he felt a heavy weight on his back. He squirmed out of grasp, darting off again, until he got to a wide stream. The only way across was a thin, fallen tree.

He didn't hesitate. Crumb, however, did, leaving Sunpaw with a chance to flee. He was soon across, though the bigger tom had started to edge his way across.

Sunpaw's eyes narrowed. This reminded him of something... Suddenly Screech's words came back to him.

"His tail doesn't work..." He suddenly gasped, jumping up. "Of course. I know what I have to do now." He waited until the tom was in the middle of the branch, before climbing back on. He began to wobble it, making the other tom freeze. "You wouldn't." He snarled, eyes wide with terror.

Sunpaw jolted it, making the dark warrior cling to the tree like a kit. "Wouldn't I?" Then, while the tom was distracted, he leapt, claws taking his belly.

"Oops." He smirked, then did it again, and again, until Crumb's stomach was just open flesh and blood. He suddenly stopped himself though, remembering that he wasn't supposed to kill.

He picked him up and heaved them over to Screech. "We have our winner!" She yowled, calling all the cats in. Her pale yellow eyes caught Sunpaw's amber ones and held the gaze for a while, before letting go.

"Nightshade, get this disgrace cleaned up. And Sunpaw, as soon as you become a warrior in the waking world, you will become one here." At that, cats yowled his name furiously, and the golden tom held his head up proudly.

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Back in his nest, awoken by a light drizzle, Sunpaw carefully cleaned out a wound on his leg, before plastering the fur around it

down on it to hide it.

Once finished, he got up and padded out of the den, over to Bumblestar. "I'm ready for training." He muttered.

"What's first?" Bumblestar turned around. "Elders." Sunpaw groaned but obeyed.

This was going to be one boring day.

Chapter 11

Sunpaw's ears pricked happily as he watched his friend pad forward confidently and speak the words, "I do."

It came out as a low meow, as if trying to mask the pride and excitement in his voice, but it was there if one simply listened.

Beside him sat Amberkit on one side, eyes so wide that they brought a smile to his face, and Whitepaw on the other, looking on happily as her brother recieved his name.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Ashpaw, from this moment you will be known as Ashcloud. StarClan honours your courage and integrity, and we welcome you as a full warrior of ThunderClan."

There were ecstatic purrs and exchanged mews all around. Everyone knew how hard Ashcloud had worked to deserve the title.

Sunpaw would miss training alongside him, and he noticed Heatherpaw looking at him with a longing gaze. *What is that about? I really ought to ask her*. He thought, eyes watching her thoughtfully.

Then he lifted his head up and began to call Ashcloud's name. "Ashcloud! Ashcloud!" He hadn't noticed others doing so, but when he did it loud and clear, most joined in.

When Bumblestar had finished the meeting, he dismissed the clan and took Sunpaw, Heatherpaw and Ivypaw out, with the help of their mentors.

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Sunpaw trotted along the WindClan border, the scent of rabbit almost overwhelming his senses. Slowly, he crouched down, eyes wide, as the long ears of the rabbit lifted up. He took another step forward, and winced as his paw snapped a twig.

The rabbit glanced around at this, saw Sunpaw's ears, then darted away. Sunpaw, however, was quicker. He leapt out of his hiding spot and onto the creature in a heartbeat, and after just seconds the writhing mass of fur was just a heap on the floor. "Good catch, Sunpaw." His ears pricked to the sound of Bumblestar's voice.

He swivelled his head around, nodded, and continued on, trying to ignore the pained look in his mentor's eyes.

He had been deliberately avoiding him for a while now, only because he couldn't bear to face him with the knowledge that he was training in the Dark Forest. By now Sunpaw hated it there, though he unwillingly agreed that it did - sometimes- make him stronger. Still, he couldn't leave. They haunted every single dream he had. He just had to go with it.

When they came back, Sunpaw found himself walking across camp with Heatherpaw by his side.

He stopped suddenly, ears twitching for her to do so too. "I know that it's not my place to pry or anything, but what is it with you and Ashpaw-I mean, Ashcloud?"

His sister's eyes widened for a heartbeat, before she narrowed them quickly, turning her head away slightly. "I don't know what you mean." She mewed, eyes narrowed.

Though the average tom would have either gotten the hint that the subject wasn't to be touched upon and walked on, or not gotten the hint and moved on anyway, Sunpaw knew his sister.

He flicked her gently with his tail. "You can tell me." He promised, and after a few seconds of hesitant decision, she finally turned back to him, looking at him happily. "I think I like him!" She purred happily, her tail-tip curling in sudden delight.

Sunpaw was not expecting that.

He struggled for words as she beamed at him, eyes shining. Love? How could she think about love at a time like this?

His gaze suddenly blazed with a scorching fury. "You should really

get your head out of the clouds, Heatherpaw." He hissed, the cold aggression rising in his voice.

He suddenly turned around, stomping back towards the camp entrance, but Heatherpaw beat him to it.

"And what's so bad about it? I've seen the way you look at Amberkit."

Sunpaw's eyes widened in surprise when she mentioned this, but almost immediately he stopped her. "I don't know what *you* mean." He mewed stubbornly, neck fur bristling.

She clearly didn't fall for it, because she just laughed easily. "Sunpaw, you are so awkward." She flicked him with the tip of her tail, before padding off to the apprentice's den, Whitepaw joining her when she was past the medicine cat's den.

His paws tingled, and he didn't know whether it was from apprehension or excitement.

"Don't be silly, Sunpaw. There is no way you like Amberkit. She's... Not for you." He muttered, before retreating to the apprentice's den, curling up into a ball and closing his eyes, allowing sleep to take him after a long day.

Chapter 12

"Sunpaw? Sunpaw! Wake up!"

The golden tom was barely asleep when a voice roused him. He opened his eyes to find Whitepaw looking at him nervously.

"Do you have any idea what time it is?" He groaned, sitting up.

Whitepaw lashed her tail. "Sunpaw, Silverleaf wants to speak with you." She mewed.

There was a slight tremble in her voice, a weariness that was unusual for the medicine cat's apprentice. "She says it's very important."

Sunpaw leapt to his paws, padding out of the den. As soon as his muzzle hit the cold air he winced, fur bristling. It was freezing.

Whiskers tingling with anticipation, he made his way to the medicine mat's den, where she sat, quietly waiting. "Thank you, Whitepaw. I'll handle this." The white apprentice nodded, before padding away.

"Sunpaw, as you know, I am a medicine cat."

"Is that seriously why you got me up in the middle of the night? I know you're a medicine cat," he muttered.
It earned a sharp glare from her.

"As I was saying, I'm a medicine cat, so I recieve prophecies."

She paused, waiting for him to make a rude comment, before continuing, evidently glad that he didn't.

The she-cat drew in a large breath, before asking a question that shocked Sunpaw deeply.

"Do you know a cat called Nightshade?"

Chapter 13

The question shocked Sunpaw so much, he found himself unable to speak.

The silver and white tabby gave a nervous sigh. "I thought so." She murmured quietly, her voice hollow with worry.

Finally, Sunpaw found his voice. "How... How do you know her?" He mewed quietly, eyes round with confusion and fear. *She knows about Nightshade. She must know about my training in the Dark Forest!*

He was tempted to ask her for help to get rid of the she-cat, but out of fear, he contained his feelings.

"I had a dream." She mewed. "Must I explain more?"

Sunpaw's claws unsheathed and sheathed again as he tensed up. "Nightshade has come to me in my dreams a few times, making me a better warrior. Besides, she is my aunt. I should be allowed to see her once in a while, shouldn't I?"

He paused, then added, "It's not like you can stop me, is it?" His gaze held a feel of malice, one that he felt belonged there. "I could do anything I wanted, and all you could do is say 'please don't do that, Sunpaw.'"

A dangerous fire burned his heart now, one that he liked the feel of. It made him feel dark, powerful...

Silverleaf sighed, touching the tip of her tail to where his chest was. "Sunpaw, I know you. I know you'd never do anything like that on purpose. Also, so does StarClan. It is their will that you get better as a warrior, but the only way to do that is the right way."

"Silverleaf, the truth is, I hate Nightshade. She is training me way too hard, and I know why. She wants revenge.

"You see, her mother, Screech, always hated the clan cats.

Nightshade herself was raised with our clan, ThunderClan. However, she grew an odd taste for battle, a thirst for blood, almost. She is working on creating a clan of her own to drag down the clans, like Tigerstar once did.

"I'm not the only one being trained. I mean, nobody has ever been there from ThunderClan. There are many ShadowClan and RiverClan warriors there, though, and a few WindClan cats. They are very manipulative, and seem to target the ones with siblings shining above them, ones who are shunned, ones who have broken hearts, ones who feel judged..."

Sunpaw didn't realise how much he was blurting out until he had finished.
He went on to explain battle tactics, then finally what he had to do with it.
"Nightshade's mother, Screech, often has us brutally fighting to the death. I... I have killed two cats. Dead, of course, and they were evil anyway, so that's alright, isn't it?"

After explaining everything, it was almost sunrise. The Dawn patrol were just leaving. Silverleaf, eyes closed to slits, shook her head sadly. "As I suspected..." She murmured quietly. "And you don't even want a piece of what she is offering you?"

Sunpaw wouldn't meet her gaze, afraid that she would read it. He was about to lie, then decided it wasn't worth it. "I have always wanted to be powerful... I like the thought of being leader. But I would never kill innocent cats to get to that."

That seemed to settle the medicine cat, and she smiled. "I know."

She paused, then mewed, "you know, I am going to have to repeat every word of this to Bumblestar. He fears greatly for you." Her intense gaze bore into his, and he felt his neck fur bristle, but forced it to lie flat.

"Of course." He mewed quietly. "May I go now?" He asked, a wave of tiredness suddenly conquering him. The tabby dipped her head. "I'll tell Bumblestar that you'll be taking the day off. He'll want to speak to you, anyway."

Sunpaw nodded, then padded back into the apprentice's den, curling up in his nest and falling asleep.

Chapter 14

A rather groggy Sunpaw lifted his head up as a blinding flash of light overcame his features. He shot to his paws, glancing around, confused, then sat back down, blinking and dizzy from acting so quickly.

He let out a pitiful moan as he realised that it was just the sun reflecting on a silver rock facing from the other side of camp.

"Definitely worth getting up for..." He muttered sarcastically, annoyance showing on his face.

"Sunpaw, are you up yet? Bumblestar is waiting!"

A she-cat's voice- one who he recognised as belonging to Sorrelpaw- called out to him. He shook his fur, gave it a quick groom, then trotted out.

"I'm here." He mewed as the tortoiseshell she-cat came into view, her dark blue eyes looking him over.
He noticed her whiskers twitch and his eyes narrowed. "What's so funny?" He mewed, fur bristling.

Bumblestar, who had just appeared behind the apprentice with Swanfeather, Sorrelpaw's mentor, let out a soft chuckle. "You have a piece of moss attached to your ear, Sunpaw. Here, let me get it."

But Sunpaw didn't let him touch his pelt; he started shaking his head, very roughly, but only ended up sneezing, as the movement aroused dust from below him.

Bumblestar came over and gently pulled it off. Sunpaw puffed out his chest. "See? Easy." The others laughed, so he averted his gaze to the rest of the camp.

Warriors and apprentices had left the camp, leaving only Kestrelpaw, Sorrelpaw's sister, playing with the kits, Brindlecloud,

Owlsong, Ashcloud and Silverleaf in camp; Whitepaw had most likely gone looking for herbs.

"Sunpaw, I am taking you and Sorrelpaw out for training. Sorrelpaw's mentor, Swanfeather, will stay here guarding the camp."

The other apprentice gave a small purr, jumping up and down, while Sunpaw nodded happily. "Okay." He mewed, though beneath his small smile he was just as excited as the older apprentice.

Though it was cold beneath the undergrowth in ThunderClan territory, Sunpaw felt warm, his thick coat insulating him. The tortoiseshell apprentice trotted alongside him, eyes focused on the golden tail of Bumblestar as it whisked through the undergrowth.

"Here we are." Bumblestar suddenly mewed as they entered the familiar clearing. Sorrelpaw however, not looking where she was going, continued walking until she had a face full of Bumblestar's hind fur.

"Oomph!" She shrieked, taking a step back, nose wrinkled. She lowered her head, embarrassed. They all looked at one another, before Sunpaw burst out laughing.

"It's not that funny..." The embarrassed she-cat muttered, shaking her head, whilst Bumblestar just narrowed his eyes. "Right." He mewed, shaking his head in confusion. "Moving on."

He demonstrated a quick slash that Sunpaw had seen many times in the Dark Forest, though he acted surprised for Sorrelpaw's sake; she was almost a warrior, after all, and if she didn't know it, why should he?

He demonstrated with his mentor, but when the sheathed blow came to him, he acted on instinct; he darted under his mentor, out the other side, then leapt on his mentor's back, his weight making the leader drop like a stone with an "Oof".

He heard a gasp from Sorrelpaw as he slid carefully off Bumblestar's back, ducking his head with sudden embarrassment.

"Where did you-" he broke off as Sunpaw gave him a knowing glance. "Never mind. Let's just teach Sorrelpaw."

Four tries later, the older she-cat had perfected the move Bumblestar had demonstrated, and they moved on to what Sunpaw was doing; darting under the opponent.

They also practised for a while, before Sunpaw found himself tiring. One glance at Sorrelpaw told him that she was just as exhausted as he was.

Bumblestar too, it seemed, was also tired, since he mewed, "That was fun. Shall we head back?"

When they arrived back to camp, Sunpaw and Sorrelpaw headed for the den, but were stopped by a loud yowl.

As Sunpaw turned around, Bumblestar leapt up into Highledge. Sunpaw found himself panicking slightly.

Is he going to tell them about me training in the dark forest? He wondered, eyes narrowing as he passed over and took a seat below the leader.

"I have two things to do today. First of all, Sorrelpaw? Kestrelpaw?" He beckoned for the two older apprentices to step forward.

"Swanfeather? Toadfur? Do you believe that your apprentices are ready to become warriors?"

The two warriors nodded immediately. "Definitely," purred Swanfeather, whilst Toadfur murmured his agreement.

"Wonderful. In that case, I, Bumblestar, leader of ThunderClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these apprentices. They have trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend them to you as warriors in their turn."

He paused, gaze focusing on the more calmer of the two sisters.

"Kestrelpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?"

The small, brown tabby she-cat, unlike her jumpy sister, held her head high, confidence and excitement shining in her amber eyes. "I do," she meowed, her voice ringing out clearly in the camp, the only noise except for a faint sound of breathing cats.

Sunpaw watched as his mentor turned to the other she-cat.

Sorrelpaw, evidently, could barely contain her excitement. Her legs were shaking and she looked like she wanted to jump for joy.

Bumblestar cleared his throat, and Sorrelpaw straightened. "Sorrelpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your clan, even at the cost of your life?"

There was no hesitance in her voice nor reluctance in her eyes- though a lot of excitement- when she too mewed, "I do."

Bumblestar let out a soft purr. "Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior names."

He paused, eyes darting between the two, before nodding to himself.

"Kestrelpaw, from this moment you will be known as Kestreltail. StarClan honours your bravery and virtue, and we welcome you as a full member of ThunderClan.

"Sorrelpaw, from this moment you will be known as Sorrelspots. StarClan honours your speed and enthusiasm, and we welcome you as a full member of ThunderClan."

He then leapt off of the rock as the cats started cheering "Kestreltail! Sorrelspots!" Sunpaw included.

Bumblestar padded over to the two she-cats, resting his muzzle on their heads in turn, allowing time for them to give a swift lick on his shoulder before pulling away, leaping back onto Highledge.

"Don't disassemble just yet!" Everyone's gazes- including Sunpaw's- turned back to the leader's. "I still have one thing to announce."

Sunpaw's heart began to race. Was his secret about to be exploited?

However, what Bumblestar declared next shocked him.

"Now, I need to decide who is going to the gathering," the tom mewed, gaze sweeping among the crowd of cats.

Oh, of course, the gathering's tonight! Sunpaw thought eagerly. Though he'd been an apprentice for a few moons, he hadn't yet been to a gathering. *I hope that's me...*

"I have decided to take Oakfur, Swanfeather, Stonefoot, Raventail, Pebblesplash, Toadfur, Owlsong, Whitepaw, Heatherpaw, Kestreltail, Sorrelspots... And Sunpaw." He finished off with a warm glance towards his apprentice, one which Sunpaw met enthusiastically.

"Yes!" He hissed under his breath, eyes widened with happiness. "I'm going to the gathering!"

Bumblestar leapt off the rock and padded over to his apprentice.

"Sunpaw, you may want to take a quick nap; the gathering has been known to go on for hours into the night."

Sunpaw nodded, still unable to process what had just happened. "I'm going to the gathering!" He mewed again, padding off in a dazed walk.

Chapter 15

Though it wasn't cold, Sunpaw's paws tingled like they'd been dipped into cold water.

Sunpaw was trotting, following Silverleaf's long tail. Beside him were Whitepaw, on the left, and Heatherpaw, on the right. Both had been to gatherings before.

"Do you think Eveningstar will be there this time?" Heatherpaw asked Whitepaw, her eyes wide as if it were her first gathering.

"Yes. She was there last gathering."
Sunpaw nodded at Whitepaw's response. He recalled his sister talking about how the RiverClan leader and had been sick a few moons ago, and that she had left Quailfeather in charge of taking the message- and the clan- to the gathering.

Behind Sunpaw, the two newly named warriors were chatting excitedly amongst themselves.

"When will Bumblestar announce our new names?" Sorrelspots was watching her calmer- yet still excited- sister with questioning eyes.

"I'm not sure," came the reply that made both of them jump.

Bumblestar had heard and moved over to walk with the younger cats. Owlsong was now at the head of the clan.

"I'm not sure when I'll announce it, but don't worry- I definitely will. Speaking of which... Welcome to your first gathering, Sunpaw."

Sunpaw's head suddenly came up. The tom's eyes opened wide as he took in his surroundings. A huge lake had somehow appeared, with an island near the shore. A fallen tree was the only way to get across to the island, unless you were relying on the smooth lake to carry you across. Trees grew high into the sky, grass long and untouched by any but cats. Twolegs were but a legend there. It was

so peaceful, tranquil, calm.

"All we have to do is cross the tree."
Whitepaw's breath tickled Sunpaw's ear, causing it to twitch.

Heatherpaw leapt up just as he nodded in agreement. "Shall I go first?" She asked as their turn to cross grew closer.

He shook his head, and, when it was time, gave a jump worthy of a squirrel, landing square on the tree.

He kept his gaze ahead, eyes focused on the pelt of Heatherpaw as he strode across the log, steps firm as his claws strived to find a grip in the damp moss covering it.

When he reached the other side, his first thought was the smell. He'd scented two of the other clans from border patrols, but all mingled together, it was as if Sunpaw had dived into a fresh-kill pile. The overpowering scent of fish stood out the most, but a faint hare-like aroma was also detectable, as was the pungent smell of mud and bogs. Sunpaw's nose wrinkled in undisguised disgust.

As if guessing his thoughts, Whitepaw turned around. "Don't worry- you get used to the scent." She nodded over to the trees. "In there is where the gathering is. Just come when you hear a yowl, alright?"

"Yes, mother," he drawled sarcastically, before trotting off.
He headed in the direction of a twisted oak tree near the edge of the island, sitting down beside it as he absorbed his surroundings.

He was so buried in his thoughts that he didn't even notice pawsteps, or RiverClan and WindClan's scents getting stronger, until he heard a voice.

"Hey!" It was a clear, friendly she-cat's voice.

Sunpaw glanced up to see four apprentices- two toms, two she-cats- approaching. The one in front and evidently the one who had spoken, was a silver tabby she-cat. Her green eyes watched him, eyes as welcoming as her voice.

"I'm Streampaw. WindClan. I'm guessing that you're Sunpaw;

Bumblestar announced that there were three new apprentices a couple gatherings ago, and only two were there."

Sunpaw nodded. "It's nice to meet you," he replied awkwardly, giving her a nod.

A dark grey tabby tom, a dark brown tabby tom and a dark grey she-cat stood by her side.

"I'm Wavepaw," the grey tabby said. Wavepaw was watching him with curious blue eyes. "This is Webpaw, my brother, and Smokepaw, my sister."

Sunpaw nodded again. "Nice to meet you all," he mewed respectfully. His mouth opened again, but he shut it quickly when a yowl echoed around the island.

"The gathering's starting!" Smokepaw exclaimed, her dark pelt suddenly speeding into the trees, her brothers quickly following.

Streampaw let out a purr. "See you around, Sunpaw!" She called, then darted away.

Sunpaw stretched, then followed, bounding after the apprentices. The clearing where the clans were gathered was big enough, but with the clans filling it, it looked huge.

Sunpaw settled down beside his sister, who had chosen a spot in a patch of daisies. "Hey," he mewed, earning a "Shush" from a group of elders a few fox-lengths back. She inclined to him with a flick of her tail.

"Greetings, Clan cats, and welcome to the gathering." A voice echoed over the hushed whispers. Almost instantly, the island fell silent, except for the faint chirping of crickets and the ripples of the lake.

"Eveningstar? Would you like to go first?" Sunpaw watched as Bumblestar nodded to the only she-cat in the tree. The elderly grey-and-white she-cat stood up.

"Thank you, Bumblestar. RiverClan is doing well; we are thriving

this green-leaf. Our prey is plentiful, our kits and elders fed." She dipped her head, before seating herself back down again.

Driftstar rose, scanning the crowd of cats warily. "WindClan too are doing well. Just yesterday, two of our warriors, Lioncloud and Duskfoot, drove a badger off our territory."

Near Sunpaw, two warriors straightened themselves up, eyes shining with pride, as cats from all clans cheered their names.

Bumblestar stepped up. "Prey is running well for ThunderClan, too. We have two new warriors; Kestreltail and Sorrelspots."

The Clans eagerly cheered for the new warriors, before the final cat stepped forward.

"Greetings, cats of all Clans. ShadowClan's medicine cat apprentice, Tansypaw, has passed her training and is now Tansyfrost."

A cheer erupted, spreading throughout the island, before going silent.

"Now into less exciting news. Flamestar, unfortunately, has died, so I am ShadowClan's new leader; I am Flashstar. I have appointed Ratstone as my deputy."

A dark tom straightened himself up as cats cheered for him.

"I strive to live up to the standards of ShadowClan's past leader." He lowered his head, then raised it, eyes suddenly filled with rage. "Do you want to know how he was killed?" He yelled, glaring at the throng of cats below him.

"Flamestar was murdered- on the ThunderClan border! And ThunderClan stench was all over him!"

Chapter 16

If Sunpaw were to say havoc broke out, it would be an understatement.

Most of ThunderClan leapt to their paws, hissing angrily.

"How dare you accuse us of murder, just moons after you attack us?" A furious ThunderClan she-cat wailed, causing some of the ShadowClan warriors to spit insults back.

"Calm down, ThunderClan. Please, remember the truce." Bumblestar mewed, a pleading note in his voice.
Wary cats glanced up at their leader, then sat back down again, looking at their paws, ashamed.

"ThunderClan do not like being wrongly accused of anything. However, I assure you that I will personally see to whether any of my cats know of this." He dipped his head.

"I suppose we should end the gathering now." Eveningstar mewed, with a nod from two of the other leaders.

Flashstar, however, stood, gaze traveling across the crowd, until suddenly, his eyes found a pelt he'd been looking for.

He stared right at Sunpaw when he said, "One more thing. A golden tuft of fur was found underneath Flamestar's claws." He glared down at Sunpaw, then suddenly leapt off his branch.

"The color of this cat's fur!"

Sunpaw's eyes widened. His sister shuffled away from him nervously.

"Wha..." He began, but then broke off as the gaze of Flashstar pinned him to the spot. He sat, wide-eyed, as the leader's claws unsheathed, rage shining from his eyes.

Fear radiated from the ShadowClan leader, it's stench wafting from him.

He stared right into deep amber pools, fighting the urge to look away. The amount of hatred in them was shocking him- it was as if he'd actually killed him.

Bumblestar's eyes narrowed as he glanced from Flashstar to Sunpaw. "What are you saying?" He mewed, gaze now just fixed on Sunpaw, a haunted look in his eyes.

"I'm saying that this cat here must have killed Flamestar!"

If there was a problem before, now there was a catastrophe. Heatherpaw's fur bristled as she leapt up, eyes wide.

"What? Sunpaw would never do something like that!" She yowled, gaze furiously burning into Flashstar's pelt. He faced her, bared his teeth at her, then continued to accuse Sunpaw.

The golden tom could barely move- other than the shivers he tried to suppress.

The image of Crumb appeared fresh in his mind, and he remembered when he'd torn the tom open. The guilt came back to him in a sudden blast, and it was all he could do not to let out a wail of terror.

"Of course it's him! No other cat has this golden colour in their pelt, let alone that he looks like he has the strength to take down a leader. He has the build of a-"

"That's quite enough." Bumblestar shouldered Flashstar gently away from Sunpaw, then bent down to his apprentice. "You didn't do it, right?" He murmured, only loud enough for him to hear.

Sunpaw shook his head straight away, forcing his fur flat. "No, I didn't." He mewed, voice cracking mid-sentence.

He couldn't get the terror in Crumb's eyes as he shook the thin branch out of his head, couldn't block out she screech of fear as he fought to balance though he knew he couldn't.

"He didn't do it, Flashstar. And even if he did, that would be ThunderClan's job to tell him that it was wrong, not yours."

Sunpaw felt a sudden strong urge to face the leader himself. "Flashstar?"

He padded two steps forward, before looking straight at the leader. "I didn't do it." He mewed, a soft plead in his voice hidden under a tone of self-defense and a hint of a snarl.

Flashstar just glared at him. "Well, if you didn't do it, who did?" He growled, and Sunpaw shut his mouth. "Exactly. Now, stop lying. It's getting you nowhere."

Sunpaw didn't break his gaze when the leader tried to stare him down. He simply met it, and refused to break off, no matter how intimidated and small he felt.

Nobody dared to break the tension in the air. Not even Bumblestar intervened. He simply waited. Sunpaw could feel his eyes on him- and every other cat's gazes.

Sunpaw's stare turned into a glare. He put all his heart into it- every doubt he'd once had, every rumour spread about him, every time he had to remind Hazelshade that he wasn't his father... All that poured into one gaze.

Flashstar looked away. Sunpaw allowed a small smirk to grow on his face, then took a step back. "I'm guessing that we'll discuss this at the next gathering?" He mewed, and with Bumblestar's nod, turned around and literally padded off back to camp alone, with no instructions.

~

"Sunpaw! There you are! Thank goodness!" Silverleaf was the first cat to approach him when he walked into camp. In fact, she was the only one to greet him.

"Where's Bumblestar?" She mewed, eyes narrowing in confusion.

"I was accused of killing Flamestar because they found golden fur

beneath his claws. I didn't though, so I came back." He mewed, a hint of triumph in his voice.

Silverleaf just shook her head. "You'll have time for tales later."

Sunpaw suddenly noticed claw marks raking down her slender body, and a clump of blood under a claw. "What happened?" He mewed carefully, gaze darting about.

He half-expected a patrol of twoleg monsters to jump through the bushes. But Silverleaf's mew was worse than even that.

"Goldensun has taken over ThunderClan with a group of rogues, and he's looking for you, Sunpaw. He has patrols out searching for you. And..." She paused, gaze trained on her paws. "They... They killed Foxtail and Sootface."

Chapter 17

Sunpaw's pelt numbed with shock. His father was alive? "That's not possible..." He breathed, eyes narrowed. "You told me my father was dead!"

Ignoring the fact that two cats had just been murdered, he glared at her, darkness making her seem like a cat from StarClan; so different compared to the dark atmosphere. It was disturbing.

Silverleaf's gaze betrayed nothing. "You might want to wait for the others." She mewed, her voice solemn. "Goldensun is-"

Sunpaw ignored her, barging through the camp entrance.

His mouth fell agape when he saw the destruction the rogues- his father- had caused.

The nursery den was in splinters, the willow cracked and strewn about like mere dirt. He could see a white-tipped ginger tail poking out of the debris.

"Foxtail..." He breathed, gaze clouding up with sorrow as he remembered Amberkit's fiesty mother. Though most of Sunpaw's memories of the ginger-and-white she-cat involved her scolding him and acting hostile, he would still miss her.

The warrior's den was the only den that wasn't touched, and Sunpaw could scent many scents from inside; rogues as well as his clanmates.

The elder's den had met the same fate as the nursery; though the hollowed tree was not broken, the moss from the elder's nests were scattered everywhere.

"StarClan has abandoned us!" Came a yowl from Kestreltail as she emerged from the bushes. "I followed you, by the way. The others aren't far behind."

Sunpaw just ignored Kestreltail.
"What happened here?" He murmured, eyes darting around, as if expecting to see a flood of rogues charge down the camp walls.

A rustle of bramble bushes behind him startled him; he spun around to find a pair of amber eyes watching him.

"Goldensun?" He breathed.

A cat emerged from the bushes, but unfortunately, it was not his long-lost father.

"There you are, Sunpaw!" Bumblestar's concerned meow echoed around the deserted camp. "We were looking everywhere for-" the leader suddenly broke off, noticing the destruction for the first time.

Murmuring cats filed through the camp entrance, though at the sight of the camp in ruins, they all hushed.
All was silent. Until suddenly, an agonised, strangled cry broke the stretching quiet.

A black blur streaked over to the nursery wreckage. Sunpaw's throat tightened as Raventail crouched down beside the limp body of his mate, nudging debris off of her ginger pelt.

"No! Foxtail! What about our k-"

The black tom broke off on what he was about to say, and Sunpaw watched as he nudged more debris out of the way, to uncover three still bodies.

Dried blood riddled their flanks.

Birchkit's dull, glassy-blue eyes stared up, lifeless and emotionless, whilst his face scrunched up, as if still held in the terror of death. His light pelt was knotted, as if he hadn't been washed for days, and his four legs were splayed at awkward angles at his sides.

Stormkit's eyes were scrunched shut, the black flanks stiller than stone.

Amberkit's usually-sleek pelt was clumped with dust, though she

was half-covered by branches, making her face unreadable. Her tail was trapped beneath a rock.
Sunpaw's heart numbed as he padded over to the dead family, all lying there like helpless, lifeless prey.

He didn't bother to lift his tail as it dragged along the floor, or hide his sadness as he leant down to press his nose to Amberkit's usually soft fur.

His friend- his very best friend- lay before him, her pelt ragged- though surprisingly still warm; maybe she'd died recently?- as he nudged her gently.

"No..." He murmured quietly, fur bristling.

Suddenly, a white-hot fire scorched his heart, and he spun around to face his clanmates. "How could you let this happen?" He yowled, gaze aimed at nobody in particular, until it fell on Bumblestar.

"How could you do this to her?" He stalked up to the leader, claws unsheathing. "You call yourself a leader, yet you can't even protect your clan? What kind of a fox-heart are you?"

Bumblestar's gaze held no sadness, only a deep pity, as he stared at Sunpaw. "Turn around, and tell me it was all my fault." He murmured, gaze fixing instantly on something behind him.

Turning his head, Sunpaw almost choked on his own breath. "Father?" He spluttered, gaze wider than a Thunderpath.

Before him, in all his golden glory, stood a cat that could only be Goldensun, his paws drenched in blood.

A smile spread across the tom's features, his red-stained claws gleaming in the moonlight.

"Hello there, ThunderClan. It's been a while." A purr vibrated in his throat, though his eyes gleamed with hatred as he fixed his gaze on Bumblestar.

Sunpaw's heart began to beat faster as he glanced over to ThunderClan's leader; was that fear shining in his eyes?

The rare sight- since when was ThunderClan's fearless leader scared?- chilled him to the bone.

To add to that, his father- a cat he had thought dead until that very moment- had taken over the whole of ThunderClan. What else was he capable of?

Chapter 18

"Bumblestar, my brother! Long time no see." Goldensun's amber eyes gleamed in the limited light, his fur fluffed up against the cold.

Sunpaw's eyes narrowed. His father was definitely not the "loyal warrior" that he'd been led to believe he was, oh no. His father seemed to be a rogue, and a horrible one at that.

"Before you ask," the large tom mewed before Bumblestar could even open his mouth, "your Clan is fine. They're just being guarded at the moment. Well, what's left of them. My dear mate and one of my lovely kits are in my new den. I just have one more question."

By now, Heatherpaw had pressed herself against Sunpaw, eyes wider than full moons.

"What could you possibly want now? Oh, and you're no brother of mine." Bumblestar's snarl echoed around.

"Oh, I just want to see my other kits, of course!"

Sunpaw could see genuine longing in his father's eyes, and so could Heatherpaw, because both of them padded forward.

"I-is that really you?" Heatherpaw mewed, eyes as wide as a kit's in a snowfall.

"Of course it's him, mouse-brain." Sunpaw hissed into her ear, before turning back to Goldensun. "Hello, father."

Goldensun let out an amused purr. "Oh, my kits... It's so good to finally meet you. Someone-" He broke off to glare at Bumblestar. "-wouldn't let me visit."

"Come inside, and we'll talk. Oh, and I apologise for your friend's death. One of my rogues thinks it's funny to dive into dens."

Without hesitating, Sunpaw followed his father as he walked into

Bumblestar's den. He ignored the fact that Goldensun had called the leader's den his own. For all he knew, his father deserved the den more than Bumblestar.

"Aren't you coming, my darling?" At Goldensun's meow, Sunpaw realised that Heatherpaw hadn't moved.

She spun around, eyes narrowed in confusion. "I... I guess so."

She glanced over to Bumblestar, before following her father into the den. Sunpaw began climbing up the stones to the den, but Bumblestar called out to him.

He spun around. "Sunpaw?" His mentor was watching him with sad eyes. "I'm sorry."

Sunpaw just glared at him, then turned away, leaping up the stones.

As soon as he'd entered the den, yowls filled the air outside, as well as snarls. Scuffles could be heard, until everything fell silent.

"What's going on?" Sunpaw mewed hesitantly, though he didn't look at his father. When he didn't get a response, Sunpaw turned around.

Goldensun was tracing his claw around Bumblestar's nest. "This was where... Oh, good times..." His father murmured softly.

Sunpaw had no idea what he meant.

"Where what?" A voice echoes from the shadows of the dark den. "Where you killed my mother?"

Sunpaw couldn't recognise Hazelshade's voice until his eyes adjusted to the darkness to reveal a figure sitting, her stance tensed.

She didn't lay eyes on her son or her daughter, only on her former mate.

Sunpaw's ears flattened. "Goldensun didn't do that. You told me he was an honourable warrior."

He turned to his father after he'd spoken. "Right? You didn't do

anything like that, did you?"

Goldensun nodded, however. "I did, actually. But it was only because ThunderClan was growing weak with a leader who wouldn't even attack a Clan after they stole prey from us. Who do you think killed Flamestar? Me. ShadowClan were too strong. With an inexperienced leader, could they really pose a threat to ThunderClan?"

Sunpaw's eyes narrowed, and beside him, he felt Heatherpaw stiffen.

I suppose he could've been doing it for the good of the clan... He thought, giving his father a small nod.

"I'm sure your intentions were right. Right, Heatherpaw?" He turned to her sister, but she just nervously backed away to Hazelshade.

"He still killed our grandmother, Sunpaw."

"For the good of ThunderClan!"

Hazelshade just watched her son, a blank look on her face. "If you believe that, Sunpaw, then you are not my son."

Sunpaw was furious. He dug his claws into the ground, trying to keep himself calm. "I never was your son though, was I?

Hazelshade was about to open her mouth to say more when a cry of relief sounded from outside. "You're alive!"

Sunpaw shot to his paws, darted out of Bumblestar's den and watched as, miraculously, Amberkit feebly crouched on the dusty ground, coughing loudly.

Chapter 19

"Amberkit! My beautiful, beautiful kit! You're alive!" Joy marked every one of Raventail's features as he crouched down beside his daughter.

Sunpaw couldn't believe his senses as he padded over.

"But..." He watched his best friend slowly regain her breath. "You were dead."

"It would seem that StarClan does have hope in us, after all," Bumblestar mewed, padding up to the scene, shooting a pointed glance at Kestreltail.

The small she-cat glanced at her paws, gaze shining with embarrassment.

"Wh-what happened?" Amberkit mewed nervously, then glanced around her, bewildered. "Wh-Foxtail? Birchkit? Stormkit?" She stared, dumbfounded, at her family, confusion etching her features.

"I... I'm sorry, Amberkit." Goldensun's voice rang clearly out through the dark clearing. "I truly am. Foxtail... I trained with her many moons ago. She was a good friend. But Shade disliked the idea of having so many dens in his camp, and, not knowing that anyone was in there, he leapt on it. I'm sorry."

Sunpaw didn't care that the cat in front of him was his father. He didn't even care that he was the same species as the cat in front of him.

"No. You're not sorry," he hissed angrily, backing up to stand beside a confused Amberkit.

"If you were, would you be backing up your rogue friend? No. Would you be creating petty excuses as to why this 'Shade' cat murdered Foxtail and her kits? No. Look at Amberkit's flank, her

face, her legs. Are those marks of a fallen den? No! They're claw marks. Seriously, Goldensun, do you really find us that naive?"

Sunpaw found his claws unsheathing as he kept talking.

"ThunderClan are not weak, naive or dumb. You, on the other hand, are. Do you really think that you could take over ThunderClan this easily?"

What Sunpaw hadn't noticed while he was speaking, however, was that gleaming eyes now surrounded the camp.

"You're right, Sunpaw," the large tom mewed, not at all fazed by his son's outburst. "I didn't think that I could take over such a strong clan." He paused, signalling with his tail to something. "But my rogues did."

All of a sudden, rogues spilled over the edge of the camp, flowing like water to the group of cats below. Amberkit pressed close to her father, eyes wide, looking as startled as a newborn kit. A dark grey tom seemed to lead them down, his powerful strides ahead of the rest.

He skidded to a halt beside Goldensun, fur bristling. "Well, he definitely bears a family resemblance." The tom remarked, eyes narrowed as he took Sunpaw in, then glanced over to Bumblestar.

"S'this your brother? You also look alike. But he's uglier." A few snickers echoed around, coming from the rogues. As Sunpaw looked closer, he could see a few of ThunderClan's warriors amongst the rogues; siding with them.

Rowanfur was standing next to a slim tortoiseshell, Tawnywing next to him, murmuring quietly to a small black tom.

He guessed that Bumblestar had seen his clanmates too, since he suddenly gasped. "Rowanfur? Tawnywing? How could you?"

Their eyes turned to Bumblestar, and Tawnywing padded over, the other rogue ThunderClan cat joining her.

"Bumblestar, I'm sorry." Her gaze was sympathetic. "But Shade and

Goldensun can really fight, and we prefer a life of fighting. I guess it's just meant to be. A few cats from other clans have joined, anyway, so why shouldn't we?"

Sunpaw couldn't see any cats that he recognised, but others clearly could; ripples of confused murmurs spread throughout the clan.

"They don't quite outnumber us, ThunderClan." Bumblestar mewed quietly to his Clan, gaze still on his brother as he said so. "But with Goldensun mentoring them, who knows what they are capable of?"

"Well, Bumblestar? What is it to be?" Impatience edged Goldensun's meow as he looked down on his brother.

Bumblestar just stared at him, a steely gaze meeting a steely gaze. "You'll have to kill me if you want to take over my clan." He snarled softly.

Sunpaw felt his heart skip a beat as Goldensun's claws unsheathed.

"Alright." He murmured. "I guess you leave me no choice."

Sunpaw's father suddenly turned around and let out an ear-splitting yowl. "Attack!" He then leapt onto Bumblestar.

Then chaos broke loose.

Chapter 20

The command rang in Sunpaw's ears for a while before he fully realised what was going on. Even then, he was standing in the middle of a crowd of tussling cats, glancing around nervously.

Pull yourself together! He told himself furiously. *And pick a side*. His gaze trailed to Bumblestar. His leader was viciously attacking a black she-cat, Cherrypaw at his side.

He then glanced to his left, where his father and mother were circling each other. Worry flooded Sunpaw's gaze, but he felt a twinge of guilt since the feeling was towards both his mother *and* his father.

When his father leapt onto his mother, however, he felt a rush of anger pounding through his blood.

Though the most that Hazelshade had ever done was acknowledge his presence, he had known her all his life; he strongly felt that he should protect her, no matter how harsh she was.

After taking a deep breath, he charged into Goldensun, and though his father was evidently stronger than he was, Sunpaw sent him sprawling away.

Quick as a hawk, he leapt up, fury plastered on every one of his features.

"Why are you fighting me, Sunpaw?" His father purred softly.

Sunpaw blocked him out, raking a claw down his side. Despite his father's strength, Sunpaw's rage combined with his Dark Forest moves created a fury of attacks that even Goldensun seemed impressed at. The two toms kept fighting, back and forth, back and forth.

Nevertheless, Sunpaw did grow tired. Though his father was

wounded worse, he most certainly had more energy than his son. The blood of battle no longer pulsed in his ears, nor did the faint smell of blood excite him.

And a blow to the head was all it took to send Sunpaw skidding to the floor, blacking out almost immediately.

~

"How's he doing, Silverleaf?"

"Whoa! He smells funny? Is he dead?"

"He's fine. Oh, and look, he's awake! Give him some space."

After moments of waiting, there was an audible sigh. "This is taking ages. I'm bored!"

Then, after what seemed like years of waiting, Sunpaw finally managed to open his eyes.

Crowded around him stood the worried figures of Amberkit, Bumblestar, Heatherpaw and Ivypaw and the horrified face of Hazelshade.

"How... What happened?" A groggy rasp was all Sunpaw could conjure up at that moment.

Sighs of relief echoed around the- wait, where was he?

A quick assessment told him that he was in Silverleaf's den, in one of the unoccupied nests for patients, and a throbbing head told Sunpaw that he was a patient.

A rather relieved Silverleaf nudged gently through the crowd, finding her way to Sunpaw.

"You were asleep for ages!" She meowed, her tone riddled with worry as she beckoned Amberkit forward, as if sensing the eager she-kit's impatience.

Amberkit padded forward as Sunpaw sat up. "You missed my

apprentice ceremony! I'm Owlsong's apprentice! And it's about time- it's two moons late!"

Sunpaw felt his pelt prickle with shame. "I never got to cheer for you..."

He murmured, giving her cheek a quick lick. She shook her head. "It's okay. And Owlsong isn't as grumpy as everyone thinks she is. Only a bit!"

An annoyed yowl echoed from outside.
"I heard that!"

Amberpaw groaned. "I'd better go. Owlsong told me to be quick." She gave his cheek a quick nudge, before darting out.

Once she'd left, Sunpaw was approached by an incredibly worried-looking pair of sisters.

"Sunpaw! We were so worried!" Heatherpaw darted towards him, rubbing her cheek against him. Sunpaw returned the gesture, though secretly he was a little grossed out.

"I'm fine now..." He muttered, only to be interrupted by Silverleaf.

"You are not fine, actually." She mewed, shooing everyone but Sunpaw out of the den.

When Bumblestar refused to move, the medicine cat gave an impatient roll of her eyes. "Fine, stay. If you get in my way, though, I won't bother sending you out. I'll just attack you here." She muttered half-heartedly, gathering a few herbs from their slots in the wall.

Sunpaw didn't know whether she was joking or not.

"Now, I patched up your worst wounds when you were asleep, but you have a scar across your eye that I need to look at."

Sunpaw allowed her to work around him, asking questions every now and then.

"How long was I asleep for?"

Silverleaf paused, clearly counting.

"About three days." Bumblestar replied before Silverleaf could.

The medicine cat replied with a hiss. "I was going to say that." She muttered.

Sunpaw let out a soft groan. "How much training did I miss?" He muttered quietly.

"And stuck in the *medicine den*?" He added in a whisper to Bumblestar, who let out a soft chuckle.

"Don't let Silverleaf hear you say that." He murmured back to apprentice.

"Say what?" The she-cat turned around to face the two cats.

"Nothing!" Both toms mewed at the same time.

Silverleaf rolled her eyes. "Right." She muttered sarcastically.

As if on purpose, the medicine cat applied a stinging herb to Sunpaw's sore eye cut.

Sunpaw's claws unsheathed, digging into the nest below his claws.

"Careful! That's my nest!" Whitepaw's voice echoed around the den. Sunpaw turned his head around to look at the she-cat.

Dangling limply from her jaws was a plump pidgeon. "For you." She mewed, as if the white she-cat had sensed his sudden hunger.

Gratefully Sunpaw tucked in, finishing it quickly in a few famished bites.

"Thanks." He mewed.

Suddenly, Silverleaf couldn't take it anymore. "Sunpaw! Turn around! Do you want to lose your eyesight?"

Sunpaw gasped, jumping around quickly. "Sorry!"

"Toms these days..." The she-cat huffed, setting to work on his eye. Sunpaw waited patiently, claws fidgeting with a moss ball.

After what seemed like hours- but was actually just a few moments- Sunpaw was "done, for now", according to Silverleaf.

However, Sunpaw still wasn't allowed out of the den. He was still recovering, much to his own disappointment.

Reluctantly, he agreed to stay in the den- partially because Bumblestar had mentioned his assessment coming up, and wanting to be ready for it.

Eyelids closing, Sunpaw slowly drifted into the realms of sleep.

Chapter 21

"Sunpaw! Wake up!"

Go away...

"Sunpaw!" A rough nudge had the golden tom on his paws instantly. He opened his eyes to see Silverleaf standing beside him.

A moon had passed since Sunpaw had fought his father, and he had returned to the apprentice's den just four sunrises before.

"What are you doing in here?" He muttered, climbing to his paws slowly, blinking sleep away from his eyes. None of the other apprentices had woken up yet, but Amberpaw was stirring.

"Not here. Come to Bumblestar's den- there's something in there that you might want to see."

The medicine cat's eyes shone with worry, and... Was that fear?

Silverleaf turned tail and padded out of the den, tail flicking to Sunpaw for him to follow. He did, but couldn't quite shake off the feeling that something terrible was waiting for him inside the den.

Sunpaw padded up the steps to Bumblestar's den. He paused at the top, looking out over the clan just as a ray of sunlight lit it up.

A soft, calm sigh escaped his parted jaws before he turned away and padded into Bumblestar's den.

When he entered the den, he noticed Hazelshade in the den, sitting beside the leader, murmuring quietly. But it wasn't his mother that made him shocked or horrified.

It was Bumblestar.

His uncle was stiller than ice, except for the small rise and fall of his flank. His breathing was raspy, shallow and quick.

Did Bumblestar get sick overnight? Does he have a disease? An illness? Questions darted through Sunpaw's head.

Sunpaw rushed to his side quickly.
"What happened?"

Then he noticed the wounds across his leader's body and gasped.

This wasn't the work of a disease or illness.

This was the work of a cat.

And Sunpaw could only think of one cat who would dare do something as treacherous as that- and get away with it. Only one cat who would manage to sneak into the camp unspotted with supreme stealth better than even ShadowClan.

But... She was dead.

So how had Nightshade managed to hurt Bumblestar?

"I think Nightshade did it." Sunpaw announced suddenly, causing both Hazelshade and Silverleaf to glance up at him.

"Don't you dare mention her name!" Hazelshade's eyes narrowed at her son.

Silverleaf, however, looked more thoughtful.

"That is a possibility we cannot ignore. The Dark Forest can inflict wounds during dreams... Perhaps Bumblestar strayed into Dark Forest territory and Nightshade found him?"

Sunpaw turned his gaze to his uncle, nodding absently. "I hope he's alright..." He murmured, laying down beside Bumblestar.

Sunpaw must have fallen asleep at some point, because the next thing he remembered was being gently prodded on his shoulder.

When he finally managed to open his eyes, he saw Bumblestar's face peering over him.

Sunpaw sat up, eyes widening as he took in his uncle. The deep wounds no longer remained- only the blood and smaller scars still stained his pelt.

"Sunpaw... I have lost a life." He murmured. "That is why my wounds are healed."

Sunpaw gaped at him. "What?" He managed to squeak out. "How many do you have left? You can't leave me!"
The leader let out a soft chuckle.

"Sunpaw, you needn't worry about me. But a leader must keep to himself, his medicine cat and sometimes his deputy about how many lives he has."

After a pause, the leader sighed. "But I suppose I can tell you. I'm on my third to last life. I haven't exactly been very... Sensible with my lives, thinking that now that I had them, I was invincible." He said that with a weak laugh.

Sunpaw nodded numbly, then sighed, then gasped. "Who did it to you? Who killed you? Or at least one of you... Or a part of you..." Sunpaw trailed off when he realised his uncle was watching him quietly with a look of amusement on his face.

"Sunpaw, will you ever change?" He purred amusedly.

Then his face became sullen. "I... I don't know if I should tell anyone who..." Sunpaw was automatically intrigued. "I mean, they did kind of vow that they would kill my clan if I told."

Sunpaw scoffed. "Just tell me, Bumblestar. *I'm* not about to turn on you and try to kill you, so-" Sunpaw broke off when his uncle flinched.

"You're hiding something." He mewed firmly, gaze interlocking with Bumblestar's.

The leader took a sharp intake of breath. "No I'm not..." He retorted, trailing off when he saw Sunpaw's expression. There was no getting around him.

"Tell me." He tried again, and finally Bumblestar looked up.

"Sunpaw... Oh, fine. Nightshade attacked me in my sleep. I was speaking with Cinderstar in StarClan. She said, "A new era is coming, an era of blood and battle, Bumblestar, and only the rays of the sun can stop it."

He paused with a wheeze. "And when I was trying to wake up, I wandered too far and found myself in the Dark Forest. I was attacked out of nowhere by Nightshade and another cat as white as snow with bright yellow eyes."

Sunpaw was speechless. When he could finally muster his voice together, he managed to meow, "It's all my fault."

Then he darted out the den, out the camp and into the forest.

Chapter 22

Where Sunpaw was going, he didn't know. How, he didn't know. When he would get there, he didn't know. All he did know was that he wasn't wanted back at camp.

You just ruin things, Sunpaw. He thought over and over, reciting words that Ivypaw had told him so many times.

Those words that had seemed so petty, so quaint at the time. Those words that were now eating him alive.

His large, golden paws thrummed on the ground and his chest rose up and down with every fox-length.

He didn't care where he was going. *As long as it's away from here*, he thought bitterly, not even bothering to glance back at his home before he reached the end of the forest and up a steep hill.

He kept running, however, into unknown territory. If his paws were serving him right- which he hoped they were- then he should be going around WindClan territory.

Sure enough, the moor stretched out before him when he reached the top of the hill, in all its green glory. He paused there, letting out a sigh, and flopped down to his side. His head rested against the grass, Sunpaw closed his eyes with a sigh.

It took a while for Sunpaw to realise that he was dreaming.

The pale golden tom stood where he was before, on the hill. But his surroundings now had a slight glimmer to them, as if icy dew had gathered already.

A noise started Sunpaw, and he spun around, only to see a grey tom approaching him, his yellow eyes shining bright, a great contrast amongst the darkness.

"Who are you?" He snarled, hackles raising defensively.

The tom let out a soft chuckle. "There is no need for violence, Sunpaw; I am from StarClan. I have only come to deliver a prophecy to you."

His heart skipped a beat.

"I... You... You must've gotten this wrong, whoever you are. I'm not a medicine cat and I don't want to be one."

The tom sighed softly, as if he knew something that Sunpaw didn't. "I know. But I am unable- I.. I mean, I think you should hear it first.

Sunpaw didn't miss how the tom had almost said something. "Why can't you talk to Silverleaf about it?"

The grey tom's gaze revealed nothing, only guarded suspicion. "It is none of your concern, Sunpaw. Besides, I'm sure that you will figure it out soon enough."

Sunpaw's ears flattened. What did he mean by that?

"So? What's the prophecy?" Sunpaw probed, eyes sparking with curiosity. "And who is it about?"

The tom's figure straightened, his neck fur rising ever so slightly. Sunpaw narrowed his eyes as he hastily flattened it.

"Just listen carefully."

Sunpaw felt himself leaning in, ears pricked as he strained to hear every sound.

"A bit of space, please?" The tom's fluffy tail flicked with annoyance.

As soon as Sunpaw leant back, the starlit tom began reciting the words of a prophecy Sunpaw had heard many times:

"There will be three cats, kin of your kin, with the power of stars in their paws. They will find a fourth, and the battle between light and dark will be won. A new leader will rise from the shadows of his death, and the Clans will survive beyond memories of his memories. This is how it has always been, and how it will always be."

Sunpaw's eyes narrowed as the grey cat finished. "You said there was more. This is just that prophecy from before. The one about Firestar, Lionblaze, Jayfeather and Dovewing."

"Patience!" The tom hissed. Sunpaw shut his mouth quickly. "I never finished. This is how it has always been, and how it will always be. We thought it was the end of the prophecy, that we could finally live as four clans. But we were wrong.

"For the another part of the prophecy we were given just over a moon ago:
This is how it has always been, and how it will always be. However, a new era is coming, an era of blood and battle, and only flames can stop it. This is because some flames cannot be destroyed, no matter how much water there is, and those are the flames of the sun."

Sunpaw's eyes had widened whilst the tom had been repeating the prophecy.

"Where do I come in to this prophecy?" He demanded, eyes now narrowing in confusion.

The grey tom chuckled. "All in good time, Sunpaw. All in good time."

The tom began to fade away, his amber eyes gleaming in the starlight.

Sunpaw leapt to his paws. "Wait! Don't leave me! I can't go back yet!"

"And why ever not?"

Another cat had suddenly appeared beside him, her blue-grey fur shining in the light. Wise blue eyes stared at him as he took up a defensive stance.

"Hush, apprentice. You know me from your stories as Bluestar. I-"

Sunpaw interrupted her. "Wait. You're Bluestar? As in, *the* Bluestar?" When the she-cat nodded, Sunpaw tilted his head once more. "So... Who was that cat who was just talking to me?"

The she-cat chuckled. "Was Graystripe trying to give a prophecy correctly again? He'll never get the hang of it, that mouse-brain. I don't know why Firestar thinks he can do it. He's rather-"

For the second time, Sunpaw interrupted the she-cat. "*That* was Graystripe? As in-"

"Yes, yes! *the* Graystripe! Okay? Seriously, one would think you've never seen a StarClan cat before!" The legendary she-cat was exasperated. "Oh, of course. You haven't." She shook her head with a sigh. "Look, Sunpaw. I didn't come here so you could gawk about some cats from stories. I-"

"So, you know Firestar? And Bramblestar, and Lionblaze! You know Hollyleaf and Cinderpelt and Squirrelflight and Leafpool and Jayfeather and Yellowfang and- great StarClan you know everyone!"

Sunpaw was practically leaping for joy at this realisation, whilst Bluestar was just shaking her head sadly. "This is awfully embarrassing..." She muttered, closing her eyes, then opening them again to watch Sunpaw.

"What about Dustpelt? Did you know him? Oh, what am I saying? Of course you did! What about Sandstorm? Of course you know her. Oh, you're all so amazing!" Sunpaw couldn't shake off the overpowering feeling of awe as he stared up at the blue-grey she-cat.

Suddenly, the she-cat could take it no longer. "For the love of StarClan, shut up and sit down!"

Sunpaw didn't get up after that.

"Look, Sunpaw. I do know all these cats, but that is not amazing right now. If you do not sort yourself out and get back to ThunderClan soon, there won't be a StarClan to admire. You have to-"

The she-cat broke off as a loud screech sounded from the distance. Bluestar's whole body tensed, and she quickly stood. "Sunpaw, you must go. We may speak again, we may not. Goodbye."

Sunpaw's eyes widened. "No! Don't go! I still don't know what it means!"

After that, a pit of darkness engulfed Sunpaw whole.

~

Well, you can tell that Sunpaw isn't the brightest cat to live.

Chapter 23

"Sunpaw! Wake up!"

An excited squeal awoke the tom from a light doze. He was perched atop a rock in camp, sunning his winter coat to get some warmth. The sun shone bright in the sky, crisp air leaving clouds of breath as cats breathed in and out.

The golden tom opened his eyes slowly to find Cherrypaw gazing up at him happily. "I'm becoming a warrior today!" She paused as Thistlepaw bounded over. "Well, me and this mouse-brain." She added with a mischievous glance towards him.

Sunpaw's heart lifted. It had been almost half a moon since Sunpaw had talked with Bluestar, and despite her drastic warning, Sunpaw found himself surprisingly happy. The clan was well-fed, and no bad threats had come. Bumblestar was healing slowly, though he was still weak. He was starting to feel that the threat had been empty, but he just couldn't shake off the feeling that-

"Sunpaw? Hello?"

The golden tom blinked, then realised that Cherrypaw had spoken to him.
"I said, what do you think our warrior names will be? I personally like-"

Whatever she said was muffled by a loud yowl.

"May all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the Highledge for a clan meeting!"

As Sunpaw sat down beneath the rock, he felt his whiskers twitch happily. "We're next." He murmured to himself, suddenly itching to be a warrior.

Ivypaw and Heatherpaw padded over and sat next to him, and he

repeated himself.

"I can't wait!" Ivypaw purred enthusiastically, whilst Heatherpaw nodded happily.

"What do you think our warrior names will be?"

Ivypaw thought long and hard about that question, while Heatherpaw pawed at the ground in thought. Sunpaw himself thought about his own question for a while.

"Cherrypaw, please step forward."

As the suddenly timid-looking she-cat took a pace forward, Bumblestar began reciting words that had been said for generations upon generations:

"I, Bumblestar, Leader of ThunderClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down upon this apprentice. She has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and in return I commend her to you as a warrior in her turn."

The leader paused, gaze upon the she-cat.

"Cherrypaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your clan, even at the cost of your life?"

The she-cat's gaze was fixed on the leader, and her tail twitched nervously as she said, "I do."

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your new warrior name. Cherrypaw, you shall be known as Cherryblossom. StarClan honors your optimism and skill, and we welcome you as a full warrior of ThunderClan."

A soft, quiet purr erupted from the she-cat's chest, and she could barely contain herself as Bumblestar rested his muzzle on her head. Sunpaw even noticed her tongue trembling when she had to lick Bumblestar's shoulder.

Quickly, Bumblestar leapt up to Highledge once more, this time his eyes upon Thistlepaw. "Thistlepaw, please step forward."

Unlike Cherryblossom, Thistlepaw wasn't nervous. His usual calm, quiet yet confident personality was showing as he padded forward, eyes shining with faint, guarded excitement.

"I, Bumblestar, Leader of ThunderClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down upon this apprentice. He has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and in return I commend him to you as a warrior in his turn."

Sunpaw glanced over to Cherryblossom. She was gazing happily at her brother, green eyes watching him, while a pale grey she-cat- Willowpetal, Sunpaw realised- fussed over her. Then he remembered that Cherryblossom and Thistlepaw were kits from Willowpetal's first litter; of course their mother would fuss over her kits.

Aspenkit and Wolfkit climbed all over their older sister, cheering happily for her. They quietened down, however, when Swanfeather scolded them quietly.

Sunpaw found himself envying Aspenkit and Wolfkit. They would never know the pain of not having parents who loved them. Their family was so perfect, so calm, so together.
I wish my family was like that, but we're less of a family than ShadowClan is to us. He thought sadly, glancing away.

Sunpaw was awakened from his thoughts by Bumblestar.

"-Thistlepaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your clan, even at the cost of your life?"

"I do."

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your new warrior name. Thistlepaw, you shall be known as Thistleheart. StarClan honors your bravery and intelligence, and we welcome you as a full member of ThunderClan."

Sunpaw's gaze then wandered to Amberpaw, who was gazing happily at him. "You're next!" She mouthed at him, eyes sparkling. He nodded in reply, mouthing back, "I know!"

After the ceremony, Sunpaw was settling down in his nest, arching his back happily. His eyes scanned the den quickly, before he sighed, closing them. Only five nests remained in the den; Ivypaw's, Heatherpaw's, Amberpaw's, Whitepaw's and his own. Though there were still others, Sunpaw felt strangely lonely- when her first become an apprentice, there had been Ashpaw, Whitepaw, Sorrelpaw, Kestrelpaw, Cherrypaw, Thistlepaw, Ivypaw and Heatherpaw- 8 other cats- and he had grown accustomed to their presence. Now, with the den so "empty"...

Soon, Sunpaw found himself in the realms of sleep, but this was no dream.
No, the place Sunpaw awoke in was none other than the place he dreaded the most.

The place that had caused so much pain in the past, and that evidently held more pain for the cats who were unfortunate enough to even hear of it.

The Dark Forest.

Chapter 24

As Sunpaw prowled through the shady forest, he felt his pelt bristling, and didn't bother to check behind him. He knew he was being watched, as usual, and he knew that one wrong move and someone would come for him.

"Well, well, well. Look who finally decided to show up."

The familiar voice sent shivers through Sunpaw's pelt. He sighed, before turning around to greet the black she-cat and her mother.

"Hello, Screech. Nightshade." He mewed evenly, nodding to each of them. The younger of the two snarled, bunching up her hindquarters, but her mother stopped her with a wave of her tail.

"Sunpaw is our guest. We will treat him as such, Nightshade. Won't we?"

The black she-cat was evidently unhappy with Screech's decision. *Let's just kill him now*. Her eyes seemed to say. "As you wish, mother." Screech chose to ignore the bite in her words.

"Good. Now, Sunpaw, *where have you been?*" The white she-cat's claws slid out. "We haven't seen you for moons. Don't you think we were missing our prized warrior?" She snarled.

"Well, I'm still an apprentice." He muttered. "So..."

Screech merely rolled her eyes. "All in a matter of time, Sunpaw. Just be patient."

Nightshade snorted. "What are you, a StarClan cat? Whoever heard of patience at a time like this?"

Screech sighed. "Sunpaw, we're going to attack ThunderClan at moon-high as a test for you. You should be more loyal to us- you have been training with us the longest. If anyone asks, cover for us. But we will be there, should you choose to do otherwise."

Numbed, Sunpaw nodded. Of course he would report this straight to Bumblestar, but the threat still scared him.

"Now, we'll leave you to dream in peace. Wouldn't want you to be tired for tomorrow now, would we?"

After that, Sunpaw found himself having strangely normal dreams.

~

That morning when Sunpaw woke up, he found himself feeling refreshed and prepared for he day. However, when Oakfur and Breezestorm came to collect the four apprentices for battle training, Sunpaw didn't come. He claimed that he had a stomach ache, padding over to Silverleaf's den.

"-I'm worried about her, Silverleaf. Nothing more. How can she go through so much and still seem fine? I know she's not fine, so- oh, hello, Sunpaw!"

His mentor stopped saying what he had been saying and focused on his apprentice. "Are you alright?"

After a quick assessment of the den to make sure that nobody else was in there, Sunpaw repeated everything Nightshade and Screech had said, and after he had finished, the two were speechless.

"Moonhigh? Definitely at Moonhigh?" The silver she-cat mewed. The leader and medicine cat shared a silent look.

"Definitely. Why?" Sunpaw's tail flicked worriedly. When they hesitated, he added, "There's something you're not saying- I know it. If you don't tell me now, I'll just uncover it later on."

After a long sigh and a shake of his head, Bumblestar nodded, flicking his tail to a spot beside him. When he had sat down, the tom began.

"Last night, Silverleaf had a dream. She was in StarClan, and cats were streaming past her, warning of a greater force that would come at moonhigh. Then, Bluestar- yes, Sunpaw, *the* Bluestar- told her to beware the night's shade; not everything is pure, and that the

eagle's harsh cry will corrupt everything it touches. That can only mean one thing, and I think we all know it."

After a long pause, Sunpaw nodded numbly. "Nightshade and Screech will somehow defeat ThunderClan if they can get just some of us on their side."

Chapter 25

Sunpaw's paws ached. Why did he have to run around the lake?

"We're not WindClan- why do we have to do this?" He squeezed out between gasps.

Bumblestar, who was beside him, replied, "We have to be fast; from your reports, the Dark Forest have some WindClan cats in training. Besides, Sunpaw, you shouldn't be questioning your leader."

Sunpaw's eyes widened. *Does he think I'm disloyal?* He wondered briefly, his heart beating faster from a sudden rush of defensiveness.

"I'm *loyal*! I would never do something like that!" He snarled. Soon after that, he realised his mentor was laughing. "What?" He snapped, then realised that Bumblestar was probably joking. "Oh."

"Oh, Sunpaw! You are hilarious. I know you're loyal- now, at least. The past is in the past. It can't harm us now." His mentor purred. Then his face turned serious. "But actually, I've decided to do something else."

Sunpaw's ears pricked in interest. "What? You know you can tell me anything, Bumblestar."

His uncle nodded, gaze staring into the distance. "I've decided to make you, Ivypaw and Heatherpaw warriors. Whitepaw is becoming a full Medicine Cat tonight- it is the half moon. You've trained hard and you've earned it."

Sunpaw was speechless. A warrior? Already? He simply nodded. Then, he gasped. "When?"

His mentor smiled at him. "Why, as soon as we get back." He purred, and Sunpaw suddenly felt a burst of pride in his chest.

"I'll race you back." He purred, and without waiting to hear if his mentor was following, took off, running faster than he'd ever ran

before to tell his littermates.

~.~.~

"Guess what!" He shrieked, interrupting his sisters, who had been reciting the Warrior code for their mentors.

Ivypaw rolled her eyes. "What now? Can't you see we're busy?" Heatherpaw nudged her sister gently. "Let him speak, fuzz-brain." She muttered.

Just as Sunpaw was about to burst, there came a yowl from Highledge, causing all of ThunderClan to turn.

"May all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the Highledge for a clan meeting!"

Sunpaw allowed his aching paws to carry him to the overhang. He didn't make it far, however, before an all-too familiar she-cat stopped him.

"What, Hazelshade?" He sighed, rolling his eyes. He froze, however, when his mother began to groom his fur.

"Oh, Sunpaw... I'm so sorry. I never realised I was hurting you... He hurt me so much though... He killed my mother and abandoned us, his family... I'll tell you all everything later, but for now... Can you ever forgive me?" His mother sounded- No. She was- genuinely sorry. Sunpaw let out a long sigh, glancing over to where Bumblestar was. The leader was watching him happily, nodding. So Bumblestar knew what was going on.

"Mother, a someone just told me that the past is in the past- and believe me, it is. I should be the one apologising; I never really thought you'd ever apologize. I underestimated you."

The tabby-and-white she-cat couldn't hide the confusion in her eyes, but when she got no further reply, she nodded quietly, eyes glistening. "Go. Go, Sunpaw, and make me proud."

With a small nod, Sunpaw padded over to where his sisters were waiting.

"Heatherpaw, Ivypaw, Sunpaw, please step forward." The purr came from Bumblestar, eyes shining happily.

Unlike his apprentice ceremony, Sunpaw was the first to step forward.

"I, Bumblestar, leader of ThunderClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these apprentices. They have trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend them to you as warriors in their turn.

"Ivypaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and protect and defend your clan, even at the cost of your life?"

The she-cat's gaze was full of promise and dedication. "I do."

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Ivypaw, from this moment you shall be known as Ivyfrost. StarClan honors your dedication and intelligence, and we welcome you as a full warrior of ThunderClan."

Next, he turned to Heatherpaw. "Heatherpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and protect and defend your clan, even at the cost of your life?"

Much like her sister, Heatherpaw nodded firmly, not an ounce of hesitation in her voice as she mewed, "I do."

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name: Heatherpaw, from this moment you shall be known as Heathermist. StarClan honors your kindness and optimism, and we welcome you as a full warrior of ThunderClan."

As soon as Bumblestar's gaze turned to Sunpaw, he felt words blazing into his mind, the words that his uncle had spoken at his apprentice ceremony:
Flatten your fur, Sunpaw. Don't be afraid. There is nothing to worry about. Some flames cannot be destroyed by water, no matter how much there is. And those are the flames of he sun.

Those words stuck in Sunpaw's mind as the ceremony commenced.

"Sunpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and protect and defend your clan, even at the cost of your life?"

Sunpaw's gaze slid to the ones around him.

Willowpetal, Swanfeather and their four kits sat directly behind him, all watching him intently. When Cherryblossom saw Sunpaw looking their way, she flicked her tail at him with a purr.

He then turned his gaze to Ashcloud, who was nodding to his friend.

Then to Hazelshade, whose eyes were glistening with happiness as she watched her kits grow up finally. Sudden affection burst out of his heart that he'd never felt before; love, he realised, was a bond he'd never felt, but his mother's gaze was so full of it that Sunpaw couldn't help but love her back despite all she'd done.

"I do." He purred, turning back to Bumblestar, nodding to his mentor.

Bumblestar nodded slowly, then meowed, "then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Sunpaw, you shall be known as Sunflame. StarClan honors your strength and will to do right, and we welcome you as a full warrior of ThunderClan."

Sunflame's ears grew hot as the clan began to cheer his name. "Ivyfrost! Heathermist! Sunflame! Ivyfrost! Heathermist! Sunflame!"

As soon as the shouting died down, Sunflame watched as Bumblestar's face turned sullen. "ThunderClan, I also have some news that is not so exciting."

Murmurs rippled among the clan as Amberpaw pushed his way between cats to him. "You know what's going on with Bumblestar, don't you? Congratulations, by the way."

Sunflame rubbed her cheek affectionately, with a quick lick on the ears. "Just wait." He murmured into her ear as Bumblestar began talking. "I don't think I should be the one to say this."

"Cats of ThunderClan," the leader began, "cats are attacking

ThunderClan tonight. We must be ready."

Chaos erupted below the Highledge; cats were yowling in terror, bristling, hissing and snarling. "We'll get them, whoever they are!" Breezestorm snarled, standing next to his apprentice. Sunflame didn't miss how his tail was twined with Ivyfrost's.

"They'll never get to our kits!" Swanfeather promised, glancing nervously at his mate, who was nudging her kits into the nursery, despite their protests.

"ThunderClan, please settle down! The Dark Forest have convinced clan cats to attack us from other clans, and we must prepare for that! Sunflame," the tom jumped at his name, then nodded to his leader.

"You know the most about this training- you could try to think like one. I'd like you to lead a patrol out into the forest just before moon-high, when they should attack."

The leader then turned to Swanfeather.

"You will lead another patrol, and meet Sunflame's patrol by the Ancient Oak. If neither patrols have spotted anything suspicious, they will return back to the camp and help the remaining cats guard it.

"Amberpaw, Stonefoot, Owlsong and Raventail, go with Sunflame. Owlsong is our best tracker, so she will be a good help to you, Sunflame." He gave a nod to his former apprentice, then turned to another cluster of cats.

"Pebblesplash, Brindlecloud, Sorrelspots and Ashcloud, you go on Swanfeather's patrol.

"We don't know what to expect, so be on your guard, ThunderClan."

Bumblestar's weariness shone in his eyes as he leapt off the rock.

"Kestreltail, Cherryblossom, Toadfur and Oakfur, make sure any entrance to the camp except the Tunnel is blocked off. That includes the Dirtplace. Shrewfoot and Thistleheart, act as lookouts,

one in the camp, one out the camp.

"Hazelshade, Gingerheart, Heathermist and Ivyfrost, I want you to prepare the camp for battle- reinforce the dens, block off the nursery and elders' dens and prepare my den for anyone who can't fight. Since Silverleaf and Whitepaw aren't back from the Moonpool yet, you'll need to prepare for anything, including wounds."

Ivyfrost suddenly stepped forward. "Wait, Bumblestar? Could I join Sunflame's patrol?"

That made Sunflame spin around. "What?" He mewed at the same time Bumblestar said it.

Then the leader nodded. "O-of course. Stonefoot, you stay here. How is everyone with their tasks. Good? Okay."

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Sunflame led the way out of the camp, closely followed by Ivyfrost, Raventail close behind her, and Owlsong with Amberpaw bringing up the rear. His first mission as a warrior, just minutes after he became one!

As he led the way through the nightlit forest, Sunflame's ears twitched. Every slight rattle through tree branches had him on edge; was it the wind, or dark warriors stalking them?

When Amberpaw stepped on a twig, a crack broke the silence, making Sunflame jump higher than a rabbit.

He tried to ignore the fact that his patrol was laughing silently at him, except for Raventail, who was staring sullenly into the darkness.

"Moving on." He muttered, and with an irritated flick of his tail, led the way through the darkness once more.

He turned to search a different part of the forest where a slight rustle in the trees was coming from. "Wait, Sunflame." His sister's voice echoed slightly as she spoke.

"What?" He mewed, turning round. "Did you see one?"

She shook her head. "I haven't, but we don't need to check over there. Bumblestar only told us to check the route to the tree. Let's just go there."

Sunflame paused to look at the rustling tree, then nodded; it wasn't rustling anymore, anyway. "Let's go to the Ancient Tree."

~.~.~

"Any sign of anything?" A voice hissed hopefully as Sunflame halted at the base of the Ancient Oak. When he squinted, he could make out cats in the darkness.

"No." He shook his head, letting out a sigh.

"Good." Came the reply. *Wait, who was that cat?* Sunflame didn't recognise Swanfeather's voice.

"Five cats is easier than ten, don't you think, Screech? Nightshade?"

Clouds parted from the moon coincidentally at that second, revealing a large group of warriors, rogues and Dark Forest cats.

When Screech saw Sunflame's reaction, she let out a purr, though the hint of a snarl lingered in it.

"You didn't think you'd get rid of us that easily, did you? Pity. Thank you for saving our hides back there by the way, Ivyfrost. If you hadn't pulled Sunflame back, this may not be a battle worth fighting."

Ivyfrost took a step forward. "Now will you ensure their safety? It's bad not to hold your end of the bargain."

Sunflame couldn't believe what he was seeing. His sister had been plotting with the Dark Forest? For how long?

Screech flicked her tail, letting out an amused purr. "Of course not! They need to die, you see- especially this traitor." She nodded at Sunflame. "And so do you. Can't have you switching sides on us, can

we?"

As Amberpaw let out the loudest yowl she could to alert the other patrol and possibly the camp, Nightshade leapt onto Sunflame, and the battle began.

Chapter 26

The first thing Sunflame learned was that Nightshade was heavy.

Very heavy.

He attempted to kick her off, but she stayed firm, claws digging into his shoulders like thorns.

He pretended to go limp, waited for her triumphant yowl, and- it never came.

"You don't really think I'd fall for that, do you? This isn't a battle of wits, Sun*paw*, because I'd win that any day."

He hissed. "It's Sun*flame*. And that's fine with me."

With all his might he leapt at her...

And he bounced right off.

She just *looked* at him. "Sunpaw, darling, seriously? I taught you everything you know. I'm also stronger than you. No, only if you were full-grown would you ever be able to beat me. But you've still got some kit-fur behind your ears!" She tickled her tail along Sunflame's head, tracing his ears.

A yowl echoed from behind Sunflame, followed by others. ThunderClan at last! Sunflame's sigh was shortened by a pelt slamming into his.

"Out of the way." A rough voice mewed, with the hints of a snarl.

The cat in front of him had just knocked him out of the way and batted Nightshade to the side like she was nothing.

Sunflame's eyes widened as a long, golden tail whisked through the throng of cats.

"*Goldensun*?" Sunflame's eyes narrowed as he recognised the cat in front of him. "What in the name of StarClan are you doing here?"

The golden tom whisked around. "I'm getting revenge, my son. I'm sorry for not letting you kill Screech, but she's mine to kill."

And for a moment, they were equal. Sunflame felt no hatred towards him, only a great sense of loss on his behalf. He gave his father a quick nod, which was returned swiftly.

With that, Goldensun whisked around again, lunging at any Dark Forest cat that got in his way.

Seeing as Nightshade had slinked into the shadows, Sunflame stalked after his father, pawsteps light against the ground.

"Oh, my former apprentice. Hello, Goldensun!" A warm, welcoming yet incredibly false purr vibrated in a white she-cat's throat. Her one eye glared at her once-apprentice as Sunflame's father circled her.

"I don't know how in StarClan's name you are here. You died moons and moons ago, Screech. I wasn't even born. But I do know one thing: you have blinded me my whole life from who I could have been. So me and some of my rogues- and even some old clanmates- have come to help defeat you fools."

At that, cats poured out of trees, surrounding the battling cats. The second patrol, the camp-cats, rogues... Even Tawnywing and Rowanfur appeared in the throng of cats joining the battle.

The living now outnumbered the dead two to one. However, Sunflame didn't know if the Dark Forest had any other living allies from other clans, or even if all the ThunderClan cats were fighting for their Clan.

Glancing around, Sunflame saw Ivyfrost sneaking off quietly.

Without a second thought, he hared after her.

~

"Where do you think you're going?" He called out, pelt bristling as his sister spun around. "And since when do you side with the Dark Forest?"

Ivyfrost's ears flattened as Sunflame let out a snarl. "No, please! She said you'd be safe if I helped her."

"Didn't it occur to you that perhaps she was using you?" Sunflame's pelt was hot with anger. "You almost got everyone killed! Don't you care for anyone?"

Almost blinded by anger, Sunflame leaped on his sister, who, for some reason, didn't react.

His eyes narrowed slightly, his taste for blood disappearing. "Well? Do something, mouse-brain!"

"No, Sunflame. I'm sorry. I can't fight you." Her mew quivered, eyes focused on the ground, trying to control the shaking in her paws.

"Then go." He snarled, claws sheathing. "Get out of here. I hate you, and I never want to see you again!"

Without waiting to see if she actually left, Sunflame spun around and returned to the fight.

Chapter 27

"Sunflame! Over here!" The first voice Sunflame heard over the volume of the fight was Heathermist.

As he glanced over, Sunflame saw that his sister was battling a large tabby tom, his blue eyes gleaming with hatred.

He leaped quickly, narrowly missing a blow from another cat as he lunged for the cat who was attempting to hurt his sister.

Together, the two cats managed to fight the tom, until he turned tail and dashed into the undergrowth.

"Good work." Heathermist purred, rubbing her cheek against his.

Everything after that all happened so fast.

All Sunflame saw was a blur of white, a flurry of claws and a pool of blood and fur.

Amongst all this was Heathermist.

Heathermist, so brave, so kind, who had shown Sunflame so much about life than he'd known possible.

Heathermist, so creative, inventing new, crazy plans every day.

Heathermist, who had always been so nice to Sunflame, always so caring, loving.

Heathermist, who now lay dead at Screech's bloodstained claws.

Chapter 28

Sunflame forgot about the battle. He forgot about winning. About saving his clanmates, about the prophecy, about Ivyfrost, about himself.

He even forgot to breathe for a few moments.

He did not forget one thing through all of that, though.

Heathermist was now dead, and there was nothing he could do about it.

His sister was gone. Forever.

Gone.

Only vaguely did he hear Bumblestar's cry of warning, of the pain of claws in his side, the scratches down his pelt.

But when he saw the attacker's eyes...

Or rather eye...

Something snapped inside of him.

She killed Heathermist.

He attacked Screech with all his wrath, all his might, all his fury...

And killed her without a second thought.

Only then, when a third of all the cats had fled, did he stop, settling down beside his sister's body and not moving.

He was vaguely aware of other cats beside him; a grey-and-white tabby, a pale ginger tom, a pale golden tom, a grey tom, a white she-cat...

Then, as he was moved to a familiar place, the body carried beside him, he slowly started remembering the twists and turns of his terrible life.

When he began to recognise the faces around him, the words coming from their mouths, he was shocked.

"Why is Goldensun here?" Was his first question. He glanced distastefully at his father, who seemed hurt. *I didn't know he even had feelings.* He thought, eyes narrowing into slits.

"I just wanted to say goodbye to my daughter, if that's alright." It was Goldensun himself who replied.

Sunflame turned his head around to see the still body behind him, her fawn fur clumped together in places around her neck.

Looking around, he realised that they were in the Medicine Cat's den, and that many other cats were there.

Ashcloud sat close to her, grooming the clumps of fur down on her head to make her look beautiful again. A pang of shock registered in Sunflame as he realised that his friend truly did love her.

Raventail sat at the entrance, Amberpaw by his side, head resting on her father's shoulder. He vaguely realised that she had grown, and was almost as large as the black tom.

And Ivyfrost sat by Sunflame, head dropped in shame. No claw marks etched her body like every other cat's. A rush of fury and hatred entered Sunflame's mind and gaze.

Though his heart ached to lean into her, to breathe in the scent that was so close to Heathermist's, he ignored it.

She'd done enough.

It was because of her that Heathermist was dead. It was her fault. Hers.

He then noticed that other nests around him were occupied, but not only by living cats.

Owlsong lay in one of them, the former deputy's body stiller than fresh-kill. Brindlecloud and Stonefoot both occupied nests, too.

"The clan will need to bury them all." Ivyfrost's mew woke Sunflame from the trance he was in. Four dead cats lay in the den around him. *Four*.

Goldensun's voice answered her. "I suppose they will, once everyone has finished mourning."

Sunflame's eyes narrowed slightly. "Aren't you going to stay and help?" He meowed, gaze flickering between the two. "Or do you find yourselves too good for the work?"

Both shared a glance with Bumblestar, who sat beside his brother, then Goldensun looked at Sunflame again. "Ivyfrost and I are going to travel around. Not rogues, but loners. Tawnywing and Rowanfur plan on staying, but Breezestorm is coming with us. We... Don't plan on coming back."

Ivyfrost's gaze was scorching. "That's what you want, though, isn't it? You want me to "go and never come back", don't you?"

Sunflame turned away from her angrily, wincing as his neck began to pulse painfully. He glanced down to see a wound on it, long and now gaping and trickling blood since he'd opened it.

After a pause, he muttered, "You don't deserve to live here in the clans with us. It's your fault she died."

She stood up abruptly and left.

"What's her problem?" He meowed to Bumblestar. However, his uncle shook his head at him sadly.

"Sunflame, Ivyfrost only wanted to protect you by doing that. Please, for both of your sakes, forgive her."

Sunflame scoffed. Like he could forgive her for murder. No. As long as he lived, Ivyfrost was no longer his sister.

As Sunflame waited for his wounds to be dressed by Whitepool- the

she-cat had returned recently with her new name, and had begun to dress his wounds just a few moments ago- he let out a long, depressed sigh, slumping down into the nest he was in, eyes closing.

After a long while spent waiting and pondering, Sunflame finally fell deep into an uncomfortable, fitful sleep.

Chapter 29

"May all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the Highledge for a clan meeting!"

The familiar yowl of Bumblestar roused a rather grouchy, annoyed Sunflame from his temporary nest in the Medicine Cat's den.

Thanks to a quick glance outside, Sunflame could tell that it was almost moon-high again.

"Can I go to the meeting?" He asked Silverleaf, who was stretching, her jaws parting in a yawn. When she had finished, she nodded. "Of course. But go easy on your neck!"

As he padded out of the den, Sunflame realised that many stares were on his pelt. He knew that the scars he had recieved in battle were deep and obvious, but it wasn't anything to stare at.

He turned to sit next to his sister, but with a pang of pain realised that both weren't there. Instead he sat with Hazelshade.

"Bumblestar's calling a new deputy and making new apprentices." Murmured Hazelshade into her son's ears. Though his mother's voice was calm, he could see that her tail flicked side by side with hidden excitement.

The ceremony flew by, almost as if it was rushed. Bumblestar paused before calling out the mentors, however.

Then he looked straight at Sunflame. "You have just finished your training, Sunflame, but I know that you will do well in training Aspenpaw."

There was a rush of fur as Willowpetal stepped in front of her daughter. "No! I won't allow my daughter to be trained by him! He turned into a killing monster all because of the death of a quiet, weird she-cat that the clan is better off without!"

Sunflame froze. Then turned around to meet Willowpetal's scorching gaze. "What did you just say?" He meowed, fighting to keep his cool. "About Heathermist?"

Willowpetal seemed to sense her mistake, but her pride didn't leave her. "Well, she was always too nice to everyone, as if she thought we were going to attack her. She flinched whenever I scolded her as a kit, like I had just hurt her. And she's *your* sister. Of course she's going to be weird."

It was all Sunflame could do to stop his hackles raising. "She was nice because she cared, and wanted to impress. She flinched because you are terrifying! And she's my sister, so you don't get to insult her. She's my sister, not yours. Leave her alone, and don't you dare speak a word wrong of her. She was amazing."

Willowpetal seemed stunned. *She isn't used to cats talking back to her like that.* It dawned on Sunflame suddenly that the queen was just a tad too rude to everyone, and she needed to take it down a notch.

What shocked Sunflame even more was when Swanfeather came and stood next to him. "Willowpetal, Sunflame's done nothing wrong. If I lost you, I would do exactly the same thing for you. Wouldn't you do it for me?"

The proud queen averted her gaze, stepping away from her kits who watched their parents in awe.

Swanfeather had never spoken a word against his mate- and only partially because he couldn't get a word in edgeways. To have him suddenly side with a cat she disliked was definitely something.

"I suppose I would... But I still don't want him mentoring my daughter." She muttered quietly.

Bumblestar nodded. "I suppose so. Oh, well... Sunflame, you'll just have to wait until another time."

He turned to the crowd once more. "Pebblesplash, you have mentored Thistleheart well, and I would like you to mentor Aspenpaw. I hope you will pass on your skills to her."

He then turned to Sorrelspots. "You have proven to the clan that you are strong and worthy of an apprentice, so I would like you to mentor Wolfpaw."

~

Sunflame sat outside on that cold night; he was finally having his vigil. Shrewfoot had been named deputy, Amberpaw had been given a new mentor, Hazelshade, and the rest of the day had gone past quick.

He would occasionally close his eyes and try to picture his sisters beside him, chattering quietly to each other, occasionally getting told off by Hazelshade.

He could barely picture their faces, however. Part of him didn't want to see Ivyfrost's face, to look into her eyes and see a murderer, while another part wanted so much to have her back, joking and laughing with Heathermist, by his side again.

Oh, Heathermist... He would do anything to have her back again.

His thoughts mainly focused on his sisters and the dead, Sunflame slowly but surely endured the night.

Chapter 30

A soft scuffling gained Sunflame's attention. It was nearly dawn, but the dawn patrol had not yet left, nor even woken up. Sunflame was the only one up, though his vigil had ended the moment light touched the sky.

Raising himself quietly to his paws, Sunflame padded forward, paws leading him to a small hawthorn bush just outside camp.

His eyes widened when he saw what was inside the bush.

A very skinny, bony frail golden and white dappled she-cat and two small mud-stained kits, suckling greedily at her belly.

When the she-cat caught hold of Sunflame's gaze, he paused, bristling up against the cold, as she just murmured, "Help me, please." in a hoarse voice.

Sunflame immediately grasped the she-cat's scruff. She picked up her kits, and he helped them into the camp.

"Bumblestar!" He called out into his uncle's den. "Come quick."

The ginger blur appeared faster than lightning. "What is it?"

Then his eyes fell upon the she-cat and he nodded. "Take her to the nursery, and I'll get Silverleaf."

Sunflame nodded, padding down the steps to the she-cat. He gently nudged her into the now-empty nursery, allowing her to settle down in a nest before curling around her small frame to warm her up.

He watched as the she-cat began to groom her kits, and as they began to squeal quietly.

"Shh, little ones." She purred in that hoarse voice again. "I'm here."

She then turned to Sunflame, who was watching the kits with confusion. "They're so small... How are they alive?"

She shrugged. "They're only newborns. I had them a few sunrises ago. The cats around my farm aren't exactly... nice, though, so I left. Can I stay here for a while? It's warm, like my barn."

Sunflame nodded immediately, though he didn't know what a farm or a barn was, then turned to the kits. One was a golden she-kit that reminded him of himself, and one was white with pale ginger patches. He looked back up at the pretty she-cat. "My name's Sunflame. What's yours? And what are your kits called?"

The she-cat hesitated, as if still deciding if she could trust him, then answered, "I'm Calisse, and these are Goldie and Spots. They're both little she-kits and as cause much trouble as their father did. Well, before he decided that we weren't enough for him and left us."

Sunflame was about to ask who their father was when Bumblestar returned with a sleepy-looking Whitepool and an alert Silverleaf.

Silverleaf immediately crouched down beside Calisse, looking her up and down before beckoning for Whitepool. "Borage and catmint, please." She meowed as the ginger and white kit, Spots, let out a feeble cough. "This one has whitecough."

Sunflame, despite all the commotion, was strangely impressed that the medicine cat could tell the kit was ill without listening to its chest or hearing so much as a cough beforehand.

When Whitepool returned with the herbs, she dropped the borage by Calisse's paws. "Eat it. It will help your milk to flow."

The she-cat ate quickly, then nodded to the other herb. "That's for Spots, isn't it?"

Sunflame nodded, answering for Silverleaf. "Yes. It will help her cough."

~

It took a while to get Calisse and her kits settled in their nests, but

after a few minutes, they managed to do so. As Sunflame padded out of the den, the leader by his side, he realised that the news of the loner had gone around camp. Cats were murmuring to themselves as Sunflame and Bumblestar walked out, casting nervous gazes in their direction before glancing away again.

However, even though Sunflame had been awake all night with his vigil and looked after Calisse and her kits he didn't feel even slightly tired. He padded over to Shrewfoot, who was sending out patrols. "Could I join a hunting patrol? I'm not tired."

"Are you sure?" At Sunflame's nod, he replied, "well, okay, but be careful. Hazelshade, Gingerheart and Toadfur are leaving now, so you can join them."

Sunflame padded over to where his mother was waiting with the others.

"Is something wrong, Sunflame?" Hazelshade instantly mewed, worry sparking in her pale brown- almost amber- gaze.

The tom shook his head. "No, nothing's wrong. I'm just joining your patrol, if that's alright."

His mother nodded, before leading her patrol into the forest.

Chapter 31

Sunflame's muscles ached all over. He'd been hunting since dawn, and the sun was just setting. He'd caught lots of prey, enough, combined with the rest of his patrol's, to feed the Clan for a while.

At that very moment, he longed for sleep, but as he walked by the nursery, he felt a strong urge to check on the loner-queen.

He paused, before gently poking his head through the entrance. "Hello? Calisse?"

"Hello!" It came as a welcoming purr, so Sunflame stepped in. "Sunflame, right? Yes, that's your name. Thank you for checking in on me. Everyone here's so nice!" The she-cat mewed while she groomed her kits.

He nodded, glad that the she-cat was setting well. "Well, you'll want to go back to your farm soon, so don't get too-"

The she-cat interrupted him. "Actually, Sunflame, I was planning on staying here. I'm... Not entirely sure where I am, but you're all really nice. I want to train my kits to be warriors! Then they'll be big and strong and can protect me!"

A soft purr emitted from Sunflame's chest. "This is ThunderClan. And you wouldn't be training your own kits; you might be to soft on them. They'd get other cats to be mentors." At her offended face, Sunflame shook his head quickly. "I know you want to teach them everything, but you can't do that in ThunderClan."

The she-cat's eyes narrowed quickly. "You don't want me here, do you? You don't want me to stay here. You want me to leave." She looked so hurt that Sunflame had to shake his head.

"Of course I want you here!" He paused, glancing away, embarrassed. *Now she's probably thinking I'm some creepy tom. Way to go, Sunflame*. He sighed. "I mean... You are welcome to stay here, as

long as Bumblestar, our leader, says so." He finished off with a quick glance around him, hoping nobody had heard his outburst.

"Yeah, yeah, sure." The queen muttered, turning back to her kits, gently nudging them back to the curve of her belly.

With one last frustrated glance, Sunflame exited the den, muttering, "She-cats..." Under his breath.

~.~.~

Outside of the den, the camp was surprisingly warm. Cats all around him were chatting happily.

"This leaf-bare has been easy on us, and newleaf is on its way!" Sorrelspots exclaimed to Cherryblossom- the two she-cats were sitting under the shade of a large willow that overhung that part of the camp. The ginger and white she-cat replied with a purr.

The next thing he heard made him purr softly to himself. Pebblesplash and Oakfur were sharing tongues quietly. "I think I'm expecting kits!" She mewed quietly to Oakfur, who must be her mate.

He stopped what he was doing and rubbed his cheek gently against hers. "And I thought you were just getting fat!" The tom joked.

Sunflame continued on his way to the warriors den to make himself a nest, but paused when he felt a burning sensation in his pelt.

He spun around to see Amberpaw looking at him, as if she wanted to say something, but couldn't work out whether she was going to or not.

To help her out, Sunflame padded over.

Amberpaw glanced over her back, as if wanting to walk away, but stayed where she was. "Hi, Sunflame." She mewed quietly, paws shuffling awkwardly. "Why are you here?"

He shrugged. "You looked like you wanted to say something."

The she-cat glanced away, eyes focused on her bedraggled tail. "Well... I just came from Silverleaf. She... She said that I had to have my tail taken off."

Sunflame gaped at her, then at her tail, then at her again. He'd known it was causing her a nuisance- Owlsong often spoke badly of her apprentice's balance and how bad it was- but he hadn't known that it was that serious.

"Is that even possible?" He asked her incredulously. She shrugged.

"I suppose it is. Anyway, if you can spare some time away from that rogue queen, could you come and sit with me? I... I'd feel better with you there."

Sunflame chose to ignore the jibe about Calisse and instead nodded quickly. "Of course I'll be there." He mewed, gently nosing her cheek.

She thanked him with a purr, before padding off, headed for the apprentice's den.

The golden tom sat there for a few more moments, breathing in her scent. It was strangely calming as he glanced over to the Warriors den. *My sister should be here with me...* He thought yet again, casting a glance up to the starlit sky. A cloud slowly drifted past to reveal Silverpelt.

Sunflame tried to imagine his starry ancestors watching him, but he could picture nothing of the sort, just great darkness.

With one last sigh, Sunflame eventually decided it was time to find a space in the Warriors' den.

Only one space remained, and it was right near the entrance, beneath a small crack in the rock. *No wonder nobody's taken this spot,* he thought unhappily. *They don't want to get wet if it rains.*

Taking the spot after a few moments' hesitation, Sunflame curled into the nest and after what seemed like moons of tossing and turning, the soft breathing of cats eventually lulled him to a sleep of some sort.

Chapter 32

Sunflame opened his eyes to a bright beam of light.

Squinting, he rolled out of his nest, stretched, then padded out, only to come face to face with Amberpaw.

"Oh, good! You're up!" She purred, nudging him gently. "Come on, I have to have... *this* sorted out in just a few minutes. You, Raventail, Whitepool and Silverleaf are the only ones allowed in the den all day." She mewed.

Sunflame suddenly realised that the apprentice was shaking, and fear shone bright in her eyes.

"Hey," he purred softly. "It'll be alright. It'll be over soon enough." He reassuringly added.

After a reluctant nod from the hesitant she-cat, the two padded over to the medicine cat's den, entering quietly as not to wake any sleeping patients.

It seemed that the only reason that they would have to be quiet was to not wake up Whitepool. The nests were all empty except for hers, and Silverleaf sat by the other medicine cat, as if debating whether or not to wake her yet.

Every now and then, the she-cat would toss and turn, murmuring quietly in sleep.

"She hasn't been sleeping very well." Silverleaf murmured to the two, with a side glance towards both of them. "Ever since Brindlecloud and Stonefoot's death, she's been having strange dreams."

Sunflame nodded. Even though he and his parents weren't the closest, if they died he would be devastated. "We've all lost loved ones." He murmured softly.

Silverleaf nodded.

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After a few minutes, Whitepool began to wake up.

"Silverleaf, I think I know what it means now! The-" she broke off when she saw Sunflame, glancing to her paws. "Oh. I mean... Hi! Sunflame, Amberpaw!"

She glanced over to Silverleaf. "Will I be needed today?" The white she-cat asked the other medicine cat. "I really wanted to just go and have a wander around, clear my mind, that sort of thing."

Silverleaf nodded. "Just fetch some catmint- I'm running low- and marigold. Oh, and a stick. Amberpaw's tail is almost hanging off, literally, but it will sting. Also, cobwebs are always needed. If you see any, get them."

The white she-cat nodded. "Catmint, marigold, stick, cobwebs. Got it." She dashed off, tail flicking a goodbye.

Amberpaw shuffled her paws on the ground. "How long is it going to take? I really wanted to do some training today..."

Silverleaf sighed, shaking her head. "Apprentices!" She muttered exasperatedly. "The procedure isn't that long, but it will hurt. A lot."

Amberpaw's shining black fur bristled. "Way to reassure a cat." She muttered.

"If you want sympathy, ask your father- or Sunflame." Silverleaf snapped, curtly turning her head the other way to check on her herbs.

Amberpaw and Sunflame both shared a glance. *Who poisoned her fresh-kill?* Sunflame mouthed to her, causing the black she-cat to nod, a twinkle sparking in her eye.

Then, as Silverleaf turned back around, Amberpaw began grooming her red chest, Sunflame watching his paws, trying to make the atmosphere seem normal.

The silver tabby rolled her eyes. "Really? I'm not blind. And nobody poisoned my fresh-kill. I'm just a little stressed out about... Things." She mewed, glancing to each cat, who were each giving her an inquisitive look, and shook her head. "And I'm not telling you."

Shall we get her to spill the beans? Sunflame mouthed to Amberpaw.

Oh, yeah. Amberpaw mouthed back.

"Why are you 'talking' like that?" Silverleaf asked hesitantly- and with good reason.

The two cats kept staring at her, dropping the smirks, and they could practically feel the tension in the air as she fidgeted slightly under the fixed gaze of two cats.

"Okay! Calm down!" She mewed finally. "I'll tell you."

And just like that, the other medicine cat walked in, smirking at the three cats.

Silverleaf smirked back.

"Haven't you heard that Silverleaf's hearing succeeds even a bat's?" Whitepool let out a purr. "And I'm lucky to have inherited the gift from my aunt."

Sunflame paused for a second. "I didn't know you were related." He mewed, eyes narrowed as he tried to piece the puzzles together.

Then he suddenly realised. "Of course... Silverleaf, you're Brindlecloud's sister, aren't you? Hazelshade always said the two of you had a bond stronger than even the legendary Squirrelflight and Leafpool's."

Silverleaf and Whitepool let out a soft purr. "It's true." The elder one mewed, while the younger nodded in agreement.

"Right. Enough soppy talk. I want to be able to train by the end of the day so could you please hurry up?"

All heads turned back to Amberpaw as the she-cat waited

impatiently, tail drawing lines in the soft, dry ground.

A sigh escaped the silver medicine cat's jaws. "Actually, Amberpaw, you won't be able to go anywhere for at least a day. I need to make sure that I've done it properly. Otherwise, you may never be able to hunt, fight, go to gatherings-"

"-Okay, I get it. Take your time." The black she-cat mewed airily with a dismissive flick of her broken tail.

Silverleaf didn't look impressed, but she evidently ignored it as she settled the apprentice down in a nest.

As Whitepool left the den, Sunflame watched the silver-and-white she-cat prepare to remove the mangled tail.

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Amberpaw had eaten poppy seeds a few moments ago, and was sleeping soundly under the watchful eye of a hungry Silverleaf. The she-cat wouldn't let Sunflame look after Amberpaw while the medicine cat ate, nor would she let him leave the den.

"She wants you here, and while *I* remove her tail. Neither of us is going anywhere." Was her excuse. It had worked on Sunflame, however, whose tail didn't stray from Amberpaw's back.

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After many long hours, Sunflame watched as a short, bobbed tail- much like a rabbit's tail- was announced "finished".

Chapter 33

After one more hour, Amberpaw woke up, though her eyes instantly scrunched shut when Sunflame began rubbing his cheek against hers happily. "Amberpaw! You're okay!" He purred.

The she-cat, though appearing drowsy, gave him a rough nudge. "Of course I'm fine, furball."

However, when the black cat tried to get up, she fell back down almost immediately, paws wobbling.

Silverleaf rushed in. "Whoa, Amberpaw. You won't be able to get up for hours, or even-"

She broke off as Amberpaw wobbled back onto her paws, staring incredulously. "Or even now..." She muttered, eyes narrowed in confusion. "Strange."

Amberpaw gave a weak laugh, then turned behind her to look at her tail. It was covered in a thick wad of marigold and cobwebs, so she couldn't see it, but she could see that it was much shorter, and a soft yet sad purr vibrated in her throat because of that.

"At least I can stand up." She mewed optimistically, attempting to shine some light on the conversation.

Silverleaf nodded. "Now, Amberpaw, I suggest you don't try anything major today. Tomorrow you should feel better. Just go and get some rest."

As the black she-cat nodded, Sunflame led her out, tail draped over her as he led her back to the apprentices' den. *Only so she doesn't fall over,* he reminded himself hastily. *She could, and then what kind of friend would you be if you didn't catch her?*

As soon as they'd reached the apprentices' den, Amberpaw squirmed from out of his tail and nodded. "Thanks for... Helping me back

here. I... Thanks."

She gave him a quick lick on the cheek, then padded into her den.

Sunflame trotted over to his own den happily, but was stopped when a shadow fell in his way.

Slowly, he turned around to see the slim figure of a she-cat standing behind him.

"Sunflame!" Came a familiar mew.

"Calisse? What are you doing away from your kits?" He whispered- it was past sunset, and many cats were in their nests already- rushing over to her.

The she-cat shrugged. "I wanted to find you to let you know that I'm staying here for good. I even want one of your funny names! Bumblestar came earlier and helped me change my kits' names. They're called Goldenkit and Spottedkit now!"

Sunflame let out a soft purr. His father's image jumped into his mind suddenly, and his pelt warmed. "That's great!" He mewed happily. "When are you getting your new name?"

"Tomorrow."

"Wonderful." Sunflame gave her a gentle rub against her cheek with his own, then turned away with a quiet goodbye, padding into his den.

He couldn't, however, shake off the feeling that Amberpaw had seen the friendly exchange, and that the blue eyes watching him now held hurt in them.

And for some reason that Sunflame couldn't identify, he felt guilty for a crime he didn't even know about.

Chapter 34

Sunflame woke up early.

He had wanted to do some last-minute hunting before Calisse's ceremony, so his mother and her new apprentice had created a patrol with him.

Most of it was testing out how Amberpaw was doing without her tail- which was very well- but they came back with prey each; Hazelshade carried two voles, Sunflame a meaty hare and Amberpaw a starling that she'd batted from the air at the last moment.

As they placed their prey on the fresh-kill pile, Bumblestar's yowl sounded. *Just in time!* Sunflame thought eagerly as the loner-queen stepped forward. Her fur had been groomed, making the golden patches glow, and her eyes shone happily as Bumblestar began reciting the ceremony.

"Calisse, is it your wish to give up your life as a loner and become a warrior of ThunderClan?"

The she-cat glanced around her, taking everything in. Her eyes met Sunflame's and seemed to hold there for a moment. "It is."

Bumblestar nodded, tail flicking happily. "Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your new name. Calisse, from this day forward you shall be known as Honeywhisker. StarClan honors your optimism and excitement and we welcome you and your kits as full members of ThunderClan."

A cheer went around the clan as they called out the she-cat's new name. However, it soon died down when Bumblestar cleared his throat.

"I have one more thing to announce." He mewed, eyes gazing upon Pebblesplash. "Pebblesplash is expecting kits."

A ripple of happy murmurs spread throughout the clan as the she-cat ducked her head slightly like a praised apprentice.

"However, that leaves Aspenpaw without a mentor."

Bumblestar beckoned Willowpetal up to Highledge, where he spoke in hushed whispers with the queen for a few moments. They appeared to be arguing over something.

Eventually the queen gave in and nodded glumly, padding away, sitting back down beside her mate.

"Sunflame has yet to receive an apprentice. He shall continue mentoring Aspenpaw until Pebblesplash can take back her apprentice."

Sunflame's mouth fell open. He was getting an apprentice?

"I hope that Sunflame will pass on all he knows to you."

Sunflame could barely hold his excitement, his heart pounding.

However, it stopped when he saw Aspenpaw's eyes.

Full of fear.

"Aspenpaw," he whispered when they were close enough. "Are you okay?"

The she-cat jumped at his voice, but nodded, though Sunflame wasn't convinced.

~.~.~

"Aspenpaw? Could I talk to you for a moment?"

Sunflame called his apprentice over before she disappeared into her den. She froze on the spot, turned around and nodded, padding shakily over.

This was very different from the cat he'd seen a few days ago. *Is it me?*

"Aspenpaw, what are you scared of?" He mewed gently, crouching himself down to her height to look her in the eyes.

Aspenpaw narrowed her eyes. "You're definitely not as scary as mother made you sound," She mewed quietly.

Sunflame almost burst out laughing. "Aspenpaw, I'm not scary at all! Unless you decide that you're a ShadowClan warrior." He mewed the last part dead seriously.

She nodded solemnly. "I won't!" She promised. She suddenly seemed a lot happier than she had been just moments before.

"Aspenpaw, I promise that I won't do anything to hurt you, Wolfpaw or Swanfeather. Even your mother, who, trust me, is the cat I'm most likely to hate at this moment." Sunflame joked, though the apprentice clearly thought he meant it about Willowpetal.

Aspenpaw nodded, evidently forcing the purr that came after. Sunflame let out a purr. "I'm just kidding! Don't worry, I'll try to make your apprenticeship as fun as I can. Promise."

The small she-cat scampered off, ears pricked. Sunflame watched with happiness as her tail lifted high into the air in confidence. "Good... She's not afraid anymore." He murmured to himself, a satisfactory tone in his voice.

He then turned around, padding into his den and settling down onto his nest, eyes closing. Almost immediately, he began to drift off into the realms of sleep, dreaming of a bright future and great things to come.

Chapter 35

"RiverClan are doing well; the rivers are full of fish this newleaf. Foxface has moved to the elders' den, and we wish him many moons of rest."

A loud cheer went around the gathered cats as Eveningstar reported for her Clan. Flashstar had just spoken for ShadowClan, and Driftstar had began with his Clan, leaving ThunderClan left to report.

It was two moons after the attack, two moons since Sunflame had been given an apprentice.

"ThunderClan is doing well now. Since the attack on our clan, we have been healing well. Pebblesplash has given birth to four healthy kits; Lilykit, Ivykit, Owlkit and Thistlekit. Amberpaw has become Amberblaze, and is ThunderClan's newest warrior."

Another cheer erupted from the crowd of gathered cats. Beside Sunflame, the newest warrior ducked her head politely. Sunflame gently touched his tail to her shoulder. "Congratulations." He purred softly.

She scoffed. "You've congratulated me plenty, silly."

It was true; Sunflame had yowled louder than an elder sitting on a thorn at her ceremony, and hadn't stopped showering the rabbit-tailed she-cat with praise afterwards.

"I know." He murmured, glancing away to where a group of cats- namely Honeywhisker, Gingerheart and Ashcloud, along with a few ShadowClan and RiverClan warriors- sat talking, before his gaze returned to her. "I just can't believe we're warriors already."

She nodded happily. "Me neither."

~.~.~

By the time Bumblestar had called for his Clan to leave, only ShadowClan was left in the clearing with them.

"Goodbye." Sunflame called to the three warriors he'd been talking with, who nodded him a farewell, before he trotted outside of the clearing, heading through the sparse undergrowth towards the log path.

"Hey, Sunflame." Honeywhisker suddenly appeared beside him, her blue gaze fixed on him.

Without a sound, the tom nodded a greeting back.

"I was just wondering..." She broke off, glancing towards another cat, then back at him. "Well... Does Ashcloud have a mate?"

Sunflame stopped moving for a few moments, heart stopping with him. A muffled cry came from a cat that almost bumped into him.

"No..." He mewed hesitantly. *Where is this going?* "Why?"

The bicolored she-cat glanced away. "I... I'm just confused. Cats have told me that your sister was his mate. But I didn't know you had a sister. Are they lying?"

Sunflame sighed. He waited a long, long time, before mewing, "Heathermist. Heathermist was my sister's name. They truly loved each other. They became mates shortly before she was killed by a cat named Screech, just two days before you came. I killed Screech after that."

It was all Sunflame was willing to say, and the she-cat seemed to sense that. "Okay."

For some reason, Honeywhisker seemed a lot happier than when she was originally, and Sunflame couldn't help but wonder why.

Eventually, he realised that it all led down to one thing.

Did she like Ashcloud?

~.~.~

"Carry me, Sunflame!"

"Be a badger! Be a badger!"

"No! He's ShadowClan!"

"What? Spottedkit, ShadowClan are too scary. He should be a butterfly!"

"Can you imagine Sunflame being a butterfly?"

"Good point. He could be a spider!"

"What? A spider- really?"

"What? They're scary!"

Sunflame's head hurt, though not as much as his tail. Goldenkit and Spottedkit had been batting it about earlier, and it now bore the teeth and claw marks of kits.

Just a few hours ago, Sunflame had been asleep, tired out from the gathering.

It was midday, and the two eldest kits were bored. Pebblesplash's kits, just a half-moon old, weren't old enough to play with the bigger kits, so they just attacked each other- or rather, cuddled each other; they were so small, claws and teeth didn't really do much.

Sunflame sighed happily, crouching down and picking them up on his back. "I'm a badger!" He snarled, lumbering around with Honeywhisker's kits on his back.

Both were squealing in delight, claws digging into his back.

He circled the camp twice, "startling" many warriors, before dropping them off at the nursery, where their mother was waiting.

"Thanks for looking after them." The she-cat mewed gratefully. "I feel much better now that I've actually gotten some rest."

Sunflame nodded kindly. "That's what friends are for, isn't it?"

He turned around to pad away, but the queen called him back. "That's what we are, right? Just friends?"

Sunflame nodded, confusion lighting in his amber gaze. "Of course. Why wouldn't we be friends? Don't you want to be friends?"

The she-cat's gaze held humour, yet also... Was that sadness?

"Of course I want to be friends, Sunflame." She paused, glancing over his shoulder, then added, "your she-cat *friend* is waiting for you."

Her eyes gained a more teasing, affectionate look as he fidgeted. "What do you mean by *friend*? Because me and Amberblaze- that is who were talking about, right?- are just friends. Nothing more than that. I wouldn't want it to be any other way."

Honeywhisker's gaze turned sorrowful and worried. "Turn around." She murmured.

He did, and he was shocked to find Amberblaze standing right behind him, her gaze full of pain.

"I have a feeling that she doesn't feel the same way about you."

Chapter 36

"Just friends." His fiery friend murmured. "After all this, after everything we've been through together, we're *just friends?* Don't I mean anything more than that to you?" Her blue gaze burned.

If Sunflame had fidgeted before, then now, he was flopping like a fish in front of her. "I..." He mewed hopelessly, glancing around as if looking for help.

"No, Sunflame. You have to tell me now. Is that seriously all you think of our... Our *friendship*?"

Sunflame's ears grew hot- and not only with embarrassment.

"I do not have to tell you anything." He snapped, storming off into the forest.

~.~.~

"Wait! Sunflame!"

He ignored the voice. "Go away, mother." Then he stopped. "Wait, why are you here?"

Hazelshade appeared, panting, as she skidded through the undergrowth after him. "Sunflame, as your mother, I'm here to give you advice and you're going to listen to it."

He let out a long, bored groan. "A lecture? Really?"

Hazelshade rolled her eyes. "Is that all you think us mothers do? Lecture their kits?" She sighed. "No- well, in this case, maybe, but usually we're more than that. Anyway... Seriously, Sunflame? I heard every word of your little conversation with those two she-cats. Are you seriously that blind? Amberblaze loves you! I don't know about that queen- she seems to like both you and Ashcloud- but Sunflame, stop messing around and open your eyes!"

Sunflame gaped at his mother. Amberblaze liked him? Was she mad? "Are you mad?" He mewed incredulously, eyes narrowing. "Of course she doesn't like me."

His mother muttered, "she doesn't like you, she *loves* you."

Sunflame sighed, sitting down. "I... I don't know if I like her though..." He muttered, tail twitching nervously. Was his mother correct? Did the she-cat really like him? Did Amberblaze truly love him?

The idea made him feel warm with happiness.

That made him freeze. *Does that mean I like her too?* He wondered.

He felt his heart begin to thump harder and harder, faster and faster. He closed his eyes, picturing the she-cat in his head, imagining the sweet, fragrant smell of her. He could still smell it now.

Did he actually like her?

Or more...

Did he love her?

Chapter 37

Paws thudded against the grassy ground quickly, though the *thud* didn't quite match his heart. His heart, which was not only accelerated because of the speed he was going at.

Did he actually love Amberblaze?

He couldn't believe it. Was the answer really that clear?

Giving his head a quick shake of frustration, he sighed, slowing to a trot.

Sunflame had bolted as soon as the realisation became a possibility, ignoring his mother's cries of annoyance.

Finally, he halted at the base of a hill.

With a jolt of surprise, he realised that he recognised that hill in front of him.

It looked different when it wasn't drenched in starlight, but he still knew the place StarClan had spoken to him a few moons ago like the back of his paw.

Perhaps if I fall asleep here... He wondered hopefully, allowing his already exhausted legs to lead him up the hill to where he lay once before. *Perhaps if I fall asleep here, I'll see my ancestors again.*

After a few moments hesitation, Sunflame curled up on the grassy patch, head resting numbly on his paws as he closed his eyes. *This is ridiculous,* his sensible half reminded himself, while the other replied, *It's my best chance at sorting things out.*

Sleep didn't come easily in daylight.

However, after a while, it did eventually appear.

~.~.~

Sunflame didn't visit StarClan in his dreams.

In fact, all he did do was watch as destruction crashed upon the clouds. As usual, the sun lit up the sky at the end, it's amber-gold rays shining upon Sunflame until destruction fled.

Then, with an echoing cry for help, his dreams shifted to Heathermist's death.

It was something he had witnessed over and over again, and still it haunted him like a shadow, always with him and never disappearing.

~.~.~

He woke up to a paw gently nudging his side. "Sunflame?"

His eyes slowly opened, and he was shocked to see Heathermist standing over him, an ecstatic smile in her eyes. Her light fur contrasted against the night sky.

He struggled to get up immediately, but found that he was locked into place.

"Shh, brother. Don't wake up Amberblaze."

He jumped, turned his head, and was shocked to find that the she-cat had settled beside him some time that night, and was now sleeping peacefully, her head underneath his. His tail lay on her flank, gently brushing dust off of it.

"Heathermist!" Sunflame could barely manage to keep the purr under control as the dead she-cat bent down to give her brother a nuzzle.

"Remember the mist that encircles the wilted heather, for it will never forget the rays of the sun that once nourished it, even after it dies." She murmured softly.

Finally, a prophecy that makes sense. He thought triumphantly.

For a while, Sunflame just closed his eyes, breathing in her sweet,

familiar scent, though it soon began to fade.

"Wait! Don't go yet! I need you here!"

"What? Want me to hold your paw? You're a big tom now, Sunflame. You can do this. Besides, your journey in the Prophecy is almost over. Someone else will take your place."

Suddenly, a blinding white light flashed in his eyes, and for a split second, he could see a white she-cat standing atop a hill, lightning lighting her pale yellow eyes as she glanced around her, rain ruffling her fur.

The image was gone as quickly as it appeared.

He then glanced down to his paws, unable to watch as his sister began to fade.

He took a sharp breath after a while, and sighed, relaxing back onto the hill as stars seemed to swirl around him and the she-cat asleep beside him.

Maybe it's not that bad, he thought hopefully. *Maybe I can have a mate now that I'm no longer involved in the prophecy.*

He paused, and with a smirk, added silently to himself, *Well, it won't be some ex-loner-queen, will it?*

With another warm glance towards the beautiful cat beside him, he rested his head on top of hers, not missing how she sighed happily when his neck fur gently brushed her ears as he settled into another sleep, this time filled with soft purring, quiet murmurs of the lake lapping against the sandy shore and, surprisingly, mewling kits and the milk-scent of a queen.

Chapter 38

"Wake up, you lazy old badger!"

"Just a few more minutes..."

"I have something important to tell you!"

"Let me sleep. I'm tired."

"Please?"

Alas, whenever Amberblaze used that tone, he always obliged.

"What?" He heaved himself to his paws, stretching quickly. "It had better be important, because I was having the *best* dream."

Paws scraping holes in the ground, Amberblaze shrugged, avoiding his gaze. Whatever had her excited must be important; she only pawed the ground when something was terribly wrong or terribly exciting, and judging by her jubilant tone, it was the latter.

Just two moons ago, he and Amberblaze had became mates, much to his mother's delight. Honeywhisker had stopped speaking to Amberblaze altogether, though they never really spoke anyway, and Raventail seemed to dislike him even more; the black tom had never quite seen eye to eye with Sunflame.

"I don't know if I should tell you here. It's kind of important."

Now Sunflame was intrigued. Amberblaze rarely ever deemed something as important. "How important?"

"As important as kits are to their mothers." She replied with a knowing smirk, as if she knew something that he didn't.

He leapt up. "Let's go!"

That earned him a shush from many warriors still snoozing in their

nests.

The black she-cat led him out of the den, out of camp, into the forest and right into the heart of ThunderClan's territory.

"What are we doing this far away from camp?" He mewed hesitantly, eyes narrowing at the she-cat as she halted suddenly, turning around.

"Sunflame, I'm expecting kits."

~

That was the last chapter!

Epilogue

"Mother, watch me!" A yowl echoed around the den as a small, pale golden she-kit leapt off of a branch of willow from the den's wall. She flew over Pebblesplash and landed neatly in front of her mother.

Another blur flew past Sunflame, this time a she-kit with a pelt whiter than the moon that gleamed in the morning light as she soared through the air.

However, she landed rather ungracefully, slamming into her sister with a soft "thud".

"Hey! You squished me!"

"Did not!"

"Did too!"

"Did not!"

"Did too!"

Did-"

"Oh, kits, give it a rest." The snap came from the two kits' mother, her black pelt shining like the night sky as she puffed her ginger chest out. Despite her annoyed tone, her blue eyes revealed the unconditional love she felt for her two kits.

Sunflame watched the scene unravel with deep pride shining in his amber gaze. Three kits had been born just two days before Aspenpaw had become Aspenfall and Wolfpaw had become Wolfwhisker. At one moon old, they were now playing like squirrels, full of insatiable energy, playing from dawn until dusk.

There was brave, boisterous Palekit, who was never afraid to speak her mind. Her golden pelt was more of a honey-golden than

Sunflame's fiery gold, and her eyes were blue, though unlike her mother, they were more of a dull, grey-blue than navy. Soft, darker dapples ran along her pelt, though Sunflame could tell that with age, they would soon disappear. The faintest tabby stripes also adorned her fur, though unlike her dapples, they would become more evident over time.

His second kit, Moonkit, was second to none when it came to kindness. The shy she-kit, though evidently Sunflame's daughter, looked nothing like both of her parents or sister, instead bearing a strange resemblance to Ivyfrost, with her snow-white pelt. Her eyes were a startling pale yellow.

His daughter actually reminded him of some other cat, though he couldn't quite place a name.

His third kit was a small black tom they had named Nightkit. He hadn't even seen the sunrise over the nursery, having been born stillborn. He'd never even taken one breath.

Though weighed down by the death of his son, Sunflame never found it as an excuse not to spend every spare moment of his time in the nursery with his kits and be the father that Goldensun never was.

He watched his kits for a while, until Pebblesplash's four kits, now apprentices, padded into the nursery to see their mother. Pebblesplash lay on her side, her belly swollen with her second litter of kits, and though she was evidently exhausted, she didn't stop her kits from hauling her up and taking her to the fresh-kill pile to see their catches.

Before long, Sunflame felt his gaze drift back towards his own kits. Moonkit was attempting to catch a butterfly, which had most likely flown in when Sunflame's gaze was averted. Palekit was trying to chase her own tail.

He let out a soft chuckle the same time that Amberblaze did, and when his mate turned her head to face him, her eyes were filled with such love and adoration that he almost jumped. *Perhaps she does love me as much as I love her and the kits,* he thought as he

rested his head on top of Amberblaze's, tail wrapping around her as his kits kept playing.

After a while, he returned to his own thoughts, and with a smirk to himself, he murmured, "Nope. I definitely love them more."

~

And... That's the end of the book!

Can you guess who Moonkit bears a resemblance to?

Hey!

[image]

Hey there!

To be honest, I never expected this book to get ANYWHERE. I thought it would turn out bad and I'd discontinue it.

But with over 50k views and over 2k votes, Rising Sun is by far the best thing I've ever written.

A sequel is now out, called Falling Moon. It follows the lives of Sunflame's two daughters, Moonkit and Palekit, and shows how the prophecy turns out, even having a prophecy of its own.

I also started on a side-book, but I'm afraid that it was taken down due to my perfectionist personality; I felt like it wasn't good enough.

It was called Ivyfrost's Mistake, and told the story of Ivyfrost, Goldensun and Breezestorm as they left the Clans, and their journey to find a good home, where they didn't have to be judged by their past mistakes.

Here was the old cover, just in case you wanted to remember the young white she-cat who was tricked into betraying her Clan.

Q and A

Hey!

This chapter is a question and answer section, if you can't tell by the name.

In it, I'll be asking some questions to my most awesome readers, you, and you can answer them in the comments.

You can also ask some questions of your own- about anything from the book, to inspiration, to favorite characters, or even about me. You can even ask questions to the cats from Rising Sun, and they'll answer them as honestly as they can!

Let me start with 5 questions of my own, and below it, I'll give you some facts about the book that you may or may not already know.

First, the questions:

1) Who is your favorite character?
(Mine is Sunflame, obviously.)

2) Who is your least favorite character? If you don't have one, which character was least developed that you would have liked to get to know more?
(I don't think I have a least favourite cat, but I would have liked to develop some of the warriors more- Gingerheart, who is Goldensun and Bumblestar's mother, for instance.)

3) What is your biggest ship of this book?
(My ship is definitely Ambersun/Amberflame/Sunblaze. 😍)

4) And your least favorite ship?
(Probably Honeysun- Honeywhisker (AKA Calisse) and Sunflame.)

5) Out of 10, how would you rate the book, with 0 being rubbish and 10 being superduperspectaculamazing?
(10. Duh.)

and now, some facts that you most likely wouldn't have known until this day:

Bumbleheart always loved Hazelshade. It broke his heart when she chose his brother over him when *he* was deputy, which is the main reason why he went against his brother in the prologue. If Hazelshade hadn't picked a mate by then, Bumbleheart would have most likely gone with his brother and ThunderClan would be under the rule of an evil cat.

Amberblaze actually liked Ashcloud once upon a time, but she was smart enough to see that Heathermist, then Heatherpaw, liked him. As an older apprentice, she realised that she actually held feelings for Sunflame, and when a warrior that she loved him.

Also, if Amberblaze and Ashcloud had become mates, their kits would have been Stormkit, a pale grey tabby tom, Sorrelkit, a mottled tortoiseshell she-cat, and Swiftkit, a black she-cat with a white chest. Sunflame would have never taken a mate, and the next prophecy would never have been completed (Sunflame's kits continue it). Therefore, Clans = 💔 without fate... And Heathermist's love life. But mostly fate.

Nightshade and Hazelshade were best friends for moons, and Cinderstar used to actually like her foster kit more than her real kit; Nightshade was always staying out of trouble, since Hazelshade was always trying to impress everyone.

Amberblaze's siblings, Stormkit and Birchkit, would have become Stormfang and Birchwhisker, had they been alive.

Had the three been gender-swapped, Sunflame would be Sunfire, Ivyfrost would be Snowfrost and Heathermist would be Stagheart.

Hazelshade still loves Goldensun, but she can never forgive him for Cinderstar's death. This makes their relationship impossible, leaving no chance for them to get back together.

It was Goldensun who murdered Flamestar , not Sunflame. He

felt no remorse, up until just before he left with Ivyfrost. All the terrible things came back to him when he saw his son fully grown and a smaller version of himself, slightly hotheaded like he once was, but completely loyal. He constantly wishes he could take those horrible things back.

Ivyfrost went to the Dark Forest once as a kit. They told her that Sunflame would one day try to kill her, and scared her into being mean to him; they told her that if she was mean to him, he wouldn't hurt her. As a warrior, she realised that it would never happen, but didn't know how to apologise.

Bet you didn't know that about these characters, did you?